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## **The German Minority in Romania**

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## The German Minority in Romania

Guest editor Daniel Ursprung (Zürich)



Romanian Germans Elisabeth and Johann Weber during their deportation in the Soviet Union. Certificate of discharge for the former detainee Elisabeth Weber according to which she was released in Brandenburg on 11 December 1946. Photos - Günter Klein's private archive.

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## The German Minority in Romania

In 2009, the Nobel Prize for Literature went to Herta Müller, a German-speaking author originally from Romania. Klaus Iohannis was elected President of Romania in late 2014. As a result of these two events, a little known fact has drawn greater public attention in the past few years far beyond Romania: Romania is the country to the east of the closed German language area with the most significant German-speaking community. It has indeed shrunk to a small fragment of its previous size since the phase of mass emigration to Germany in the early 1990s. The German-speaking group now accounts for far less than 1 percent of the total population and does not play a decisive role anymore within Romania. Even in the city and *Județ* (district) of Sibiu, the heartland of the German population where Germans still were in the absolute majority in many places in the early 20th century, only slightly more than 1% of the inhabitants described themselves as Germans in the 2011 census. The share of Germans only amounted to between 3% and a maximum of 7% in a half-dozen smaller, rural communities.

If it is not their demographic clout, how do we explain that Romania elected a German president, who explicitly referred to “German” virtues during the electoral campaign and that study programs not only in Romanian, but also in two languages of national minorities (Hungarian and German) were introduced at the Babeș-Bolyai University (one of the most renowned universities in the country) in Cluj? The image of the Germans, which has been historically severely damaged in many countries of Eastern Europe is extremely positive in Romania in general. This has to do with the fact that Transylvania and the Banat, the main areas of settlement of Germans within Romania, belonged to Hungary until 1918 and the political and to large extent social elite

(nobility, landlords) were Hungarian. The age of disputes over nationality policy and the stronger attempts at Magyarization in the 19th and early 20th century put Romanians and Germans on the same side of the barricade and at least partially made them allies. Contrarily to the case of the Germans in the Baltic States, for example, there is no pronounced resentment towards the one time dominating social elite (“*Herrenschicht*”) in the Romanian culture of remembrance, as they were primarily identified as Hungarians. Unlike the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia or the Germans in Yugoslavia, Poland, or the Soviet Union (Volga Germans), the Germans did not play the role of a Fifth Column during the Second World War, because Romania was a close ally of national-socialist Germany and the Germans were once again on the same side of the front.

These circumstances show that the – for Eastern European standards – extremely positive perception of the Germans in Romania is not entirely unproblematic from a historical standpoint. The positive image of the Germans is based on functionally equivalent stereotypes to the negative clichés about other groups. The positive self-perception and outside perception of the Germans refers time and time again back to *topoi* such as German thoroughness, diligence, sense of order, cleanliness, etc., which were already previously used on the basis of the notion of “bearers of German culture” who conveyed “German merits” to the peoples of Eastern Europe. This is a viewpoint which has been definitively discredited by national-socialism, but is sometimes still influential in the Romanian context.

The role of Germans in Romania therefore must be viewed critically and from different angles, in particular because including all

German-speaking inhabitants of Romania into one coherent group is an impermissible simplification in itself. The present issue of *Euxeinos* examines the Romanian-German community with a series of eight exemplary

Swabians as well as the smaller German-speaking communities never developed. The term “Romanian Germans” is an artificial structuring concept, which primarily reflects the outside view. In the 20th century,



Saxons and Swabians in Romania. Source wikipedia

articles. It begins with an overview of the historical development of the various German-speaking communities on the territory of present-day Romania by Daniel Ursprung. The two most significant groups exhibit an entirely different history: while the Transylvanian Saxons settled in Transylvania in the High Middle Ages and had extensive privileges and a pronounced sense of community resulting from their own *Landstand* (status as one of three politically leading estates), German-speakers only settled further west in the Banat during the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

An intense, overarching sense of togetherness between the Transylvanian Saxons, Banat

Saxons and Swabians in Romania identified more with Germany than with the respective other group. This had fatal consequences in the 1930s, when national-socialism attracted many followers among the Romanian Germans. During the Second World War, national-socialist Germany asserted a special status for the German minority over its ally Romania, which collectively defined the Germans as the so-called “German Ethnic Group in Romania” (*Deutsche Volksgruppe in Rumänien*), a kind of “state within a state”. In his article, Ottmar Traşcă deals with the role of this configuration within Romania and also shows how Germans were mobilized for war as part of the *Waffen*



SS, even though they were Romanian citizens. After the Second World War the Germans were collectively accused of having been collaborators with national-socialist Germany. As Hannelore Baier shows, before the end of the war tens of thousands of Germans were subject to deportation from Romania to the Soviet Union as a punitive measure. There they were forced to carry out reconstruction work. While Hannelore Baier provides an overview of these events from the perspective of a historian working with archive sources, Günter Klein sheds light on the individual destinies of his family members. The memories of the contemporary witnesses convey a particularly descriptive picture of their years of hard labor spent in the Donbass, before it was possible to return to Romania. This actor-centered perspective provides insights into individual fates, which repeated themselves in a comparable way in countless other cases. Cristian Cercel takes yet another perspective on this theme by analyzing the deportation to the Soviet Union in the culture of remembrance. What is typical is that the deportation did not play an important role for the culture of remembrance until relatively late, in Germany in particular after the mid-1970s and among the Romanian public only after 1989 – thus one or two generations after the events. Cercel correctly highlights that the deportation should be viewed in the larger context of the preceding events, above all the uncritical stance towards and indeed frequent enthusiasm of many Germans for national-socialism. This aspect demonstrates the selectivity of the narrative of remembrance, which is primarily focused on one's own role as a victim and only marginally takes into account the links between the deportation and the commitment to the national-socialist policy of conquest and destruction.

The position that national minorities and in particular the Hungarians and Germans as the largest national minorities took in the socialist regime is a question on which historians are still far from having reached a consensus. Hungarians and Germans frequently refer to the repressive policies of the regime, by which many Germans also felt repressed, in particular in the later years of the Ceaușescu regimes (1965-1989). However, the extent to which the increasingly chauvinistic rhetoric of the regime can in fact be understood as a policy of "Romanianization" aimed primarily against the minorities is anything but certain at the current stage of the discussion, despite the very firm opinions on all sides. It should also be taken into consideration that the repressions are not to be exclusively and not even primarily understood from an ethno-national perspective, as the Romanian majority population suffered to a similar extent from the many restrictions.

In this regard, Markus Bauer offers an interesting perspective on the Banat Action Group (*Aktionsgruppe Banat*), a literary circle of German-speaking authors in the Western Romanian Banat region, who came into conflict with the regime. This conflict had more to do with the increasing repressions by the regime against true or purported members of the opposition than with ethno-national suppression. Markus Bauer also points out that the actions of the group were driven, in particular, by a desire to distance themselves from the traditional "Germanness" of their parents' generation and – analogously to the 1968 movement in the west – to critically assess their conduct during the Second World War. Florian Kühner-Wielach shows once again that the juxtaposition of the oppressed minorities and repressive "Romanian" regime is oversimplified. The question of collaboration

with the regime, which spied on Romanian society by means of numerous informers, was raised with regard to members of minorities as well. The example of informer activities within the German-speaking literature scene of Romania shows that binary categories such as victim and perpetrator overlook the much more complex realities. Coming to terms with the past is all the more difficult in the presented examples, as this process is largely being carried out in Germany, where most of the protagonists have emigrated to. Kühner-Wielach provides a more distanced perspective on the often emotional debate among the German public, in which a relatively small network of people who know each other well are making moral and legal accusations against one another. Besides these problems, which are primarily relevant to insiders, the analysis of this group of people enables us to exemplarily address issues of historical research on collaboration and strategies of action under repressive socialist rule.

To conclude, Benjamin Józsa, Managing Director of the Democratic Forum of the Germans in Romania - the interest representation of the German minority-, sheds light on the contemporary situation of the German minority by looking at the city of Sibiu, which has traditionally been the center of the Germans in Romania. He explains how the German physics teacher Klaus Iohannis succeeded in being elected mayor of this city several times after the year 2000 due to his solid performance. Ultimately he even became President of Romania in 2014, despite the fact that his voters were primarily from the Romanian majority population. However, this success does not necessarily alleviate the structural problems of the German minority in Romania, which is overaged and lacks an

assertive young generation. This poses a major challenge for the school system.

Although far from presenting a complete overview of the history and present situation of the Germans in Romania, this edition of Euxeinos outlines a wide range of problems which have played and still play a central role in the Romanian-German communities. The future will show to what extent an enduring feeling of belonging to the German nation will sustain itself after the many disruptions and discontinuities of the 19th and 20th centuries.

*Translated by Michael Dobbins*

#### **ABOUT THE EDITOR**

Daniel Ursprung, researcher and teaching assistant at the chair of East-European history, University of Zurich (Switzerland), is specialized in the history of Southeastern Europe and Romanian history. Research and publications on late-medieval to contemporary history, among others with a monograph on the legitimation of power in the Romanian space (17th-20th centuries), studies on the comparative history of personality-cults in socialist regimes and on the history of Wallachia.

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# The German Minority in Romania: a Historical Overview\*

by Daniel Ursprung, Zürich

For many centuries German-speaking people lived as minorities in widely dispersed linguistic enclaves across East Central and Eastern Europe. As a consequence of the Second World War, the presence of Germans was restricted to small remaining groups or ended in many places. This can be seen in a broader context as a result of the homogenization efforts of modern nation states. However, the devastating National-Socialist policies, which were strongly approved by a considerable share of the German minorities in Eastern Europe, were the main cause of this. The consequence was the end of German-speaking communities in many places. In this regard, Romania is an exception in Eastern Europe because the large share of the German minority neither fled, nor were they evacuated, expelled or resettled. Even during socialist times the Germans remained as a minority in their ancestral environment and sustained an active German-speaking cultural life and education system, albeit under strict political restrictions which also applied to the Romanian majority. The economic decline and the increasing political repressions in Ceaușescu's Romania in the 1980s prompted an increasing number of Germans to emigrate to the Federal Republic of Germany. This was a process that began in the 1960s as a policy aimed at reuniting families. When the restrictions on leaving the country were eliminated after Ceaușescu's demise in late 1989, the majority of Germans still living in Romania departed for Germany.

\* This article is a revised and expanded version of an article which initially appeared in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on 7 January, 2015, page 7, see also <http://www.nzz.ch/international/europa/von-privilegierten-siedlern-zur-geschuetzten-minderheit-1.18455941>.

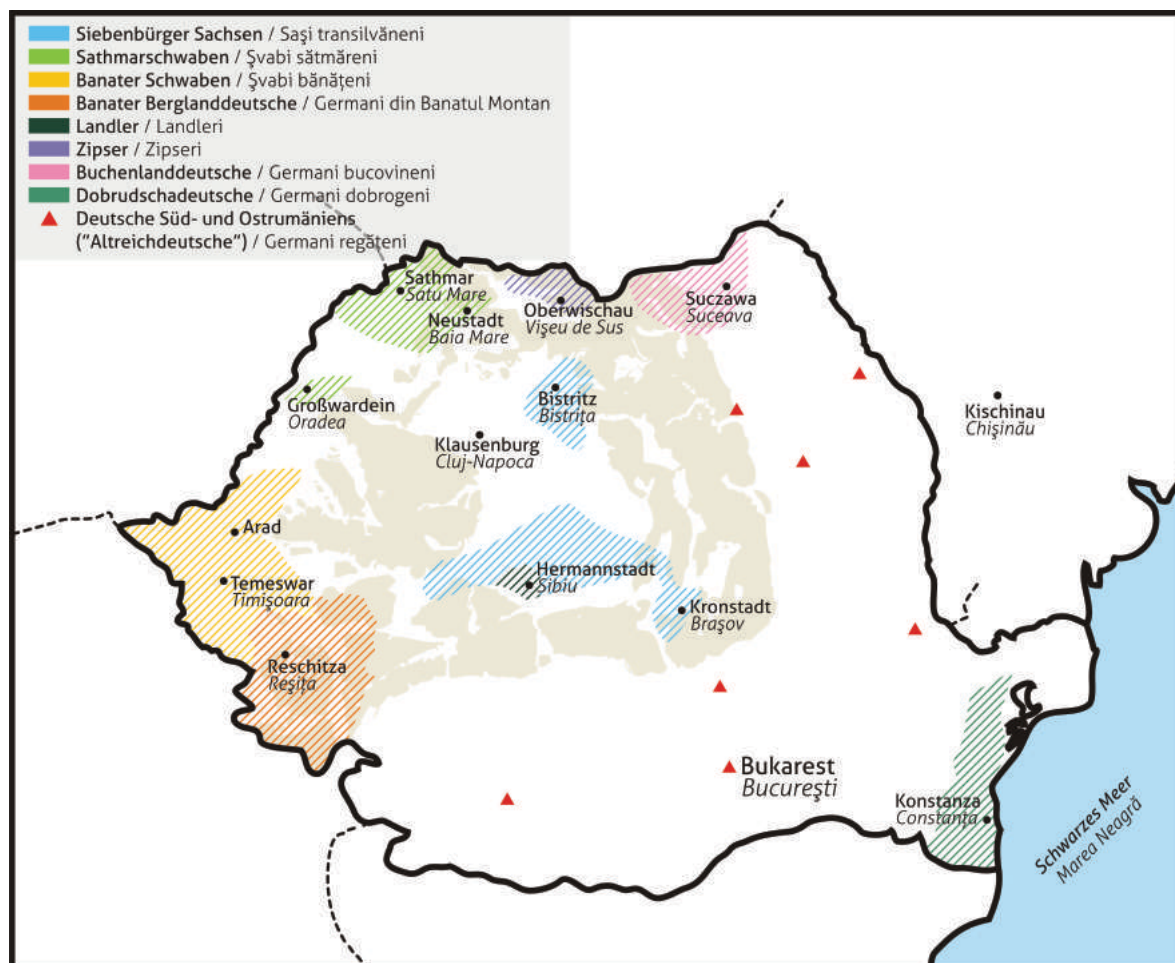
## FIGURES

According to the census, 36,042 people who identified as Germans were still living in Romania in 2011. This corresponded with approximately 0.18% of the total population of Romania, making the Germans the fifth largest ethnic group after the Romanians, Hungarians, Roma and Ukrainians. Only 26,557 people (0.13% of the population of Romania) indicated that German is their mother language though.<sup>1</sup>

In 1930, thus during the interwar period less than one century earlier, approx. 745,421 people (4.1% of the total population) still defined themselves as Germans. Germans settled in nearly all regions of the country, the great majority of them in the two historical regions Transylvania and the Banat, where approximately 1/3 of all Germans in Romania lived: 275,369 in the Banat (37% of the Germans in Romania) and 237,416 in Transylvania (32%). There were 31,067 Germans (4 %) living in the bordering area Satu Mare in North Western Romania (which is partially attributed to Transylvania in a broader sense), while around 10% of the Romanian Germans settled in Bessarabia (81,089) and the Bukovina (75,533). However, due to the resettlement to Germany initiated by the National-Socialist authorities the presence of Germans ended in these two areas that belonged to the Soviet Union from 1940 to 1941 and again after 1944 and are part of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova today. The Germans from Dobrudja, Romania's Black-sea coast region, were also

1 Rezultate definitive Recensământul populației și al locuințelor 2011: Tab8. Populația stabilă după etnie – județe, municipii, orașe, comune, <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/>.





resettled during World War II. A total of 214,630 people moved to Germany between 1940 and 1943. The large settlement areas of the Banat and Transylvania were not affected by this.<sup>2</sup> In 1930, 12,581 Germans were registered in the Dobrudja (1.7% of all Germans in Romania). A total of 32,366 Germans (4.3%) were counted in the so-called Romanian Old Kingdom, the territories of Wallachia and Moldavia which already belonged to Romania in 1918.<sup>3</sup>

2 Werner Conze, Theodor Schieder etc. (eds.): *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*. Band III: *Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Rumänien*. Bonn 1957, pp. 46E-47E; Dumitru Șandru: *Mișcări de populație în România (1940-1948)*. București 2003, p. 84.

3 The figures from the 1930 census in

#### TERRITORIES

Transylvania and the Banat, in particular, were thus the two demographic centers of the German population of Romania both under socialism and in the contemporary era. Both regions had their own German-speaking

Sorina Paula Bolovan, Ioan Bolovan: *Germanii din România. Perspective istorice și demografice*. Cluj-Napoca 2000, p. 62; for the Germans in Wallachia see Alexandru Ciociltan: *Comunitățile germane la sud de Carpați în Evul Mediu (secolele XIII-XVIII)*. Brăila 2015; Angelika Herta (ed.): *Vom Rand ins Zentrum. Die deutsche Minderheit in Bukarest*. Berlin 2011, for the Germans in Moldavia see Hugo Weczerka: *Das mittelalterliche und frühneuzeitliche Deutschum im Fürstentum Moldau. Von seinen Anfängen bis zu seinem Untergang (13.-18. Jahrhundert)*. München 1960.

community, which significantly differed from one another in terms of their history, dialect, culture, as well as confession and consistently and deliberately distinguished themselves from each other. A common “Romanian-German identity” has only been able to develop at a rudimentary level. Often the contacts with the neighboring communities (such as Romanians, Hungarians, etc.) were no less well-established than between the Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Saxons, as the two communities are called.

#### **HISTORY: WAVES OF IMMIGRATION**

Both groups can be traced back to different waves of immigration. Transylvania and the Banat both belonged to Hungary and the Hapsburg Empire, respectively, between the Middle Ages and 1918 and were under the control of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th century. The Germans based in these two regions settled here at different times. The Transylvanian Saxons emerged from colonization in the High Middle Ages. Their main identity-forming characteristics were the German language and the Lutheran confession. The Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, who has been in office since late 2014, belongs to this group. They can be compared historically with other German minorities which emerged in the course of the medieval colonization based on German law, for example in the Baltics, Poland (Silesia), Bohemia (Sudeten Germans) and contemporary Slovakia (Carpathian Germans).

A second wave of German emigration took place after the Hapsburgs conquered Hungary in the late 17th century. Southern Hungary had been ravaged by the long wars with the Ottomans, which is why the Hapsburgs deliberately invited colonists in the 18th century, many of them from the German-

speaking regions. This approximately coincided with the settlement of ethnic Germans in (Tsarist Russia) in the 18th and 19th century (the Germans in Bessarabia can be considered “Russian Germans” from a historical perspective).<sup>4</sup>

#### **DESIGNATIONS FOR BANAT SWABIANS AND TRANSYLVANIAN SAXONS**

The new German-speaking minorities that emerged in different parts of Southern Hungary at that time are stereotypically called “Swabians”, even though only some of them came from this southern German region. The “Banater Schwaben” (Banat Swabians) live in the Banat, in the extreme west of Romania around the city of Timișoara. Their most famous representative is the Nobel Prize Laureate for Literature, Herta Müller. Unlike the Transylvanian Saxons, the Swabians are primarily Catholic. The Swabians and Saxons speak different German dialogues and had a reserved attitude towards one another. The Swabians never had legal privileges comparable to the Saxons and cultivated closer contacts with groups speaking other languages – mixed marriages in the multiethnic area with new settlers were much more widespread than Transylvania, which was segregated according to the three Transylvanian estates: the (Hungarian) nobility, the (Hungarian-speaking) Székelys and the Transylvanian Saxons (Romanians were not represented in the political system of medieval and early-modern Transylvania). The strong solidarity among the Saxons and their more historically distinct identity as

4 For the different waves of immigration and the different German groups in Eastern Europe see the series *Reihe Werner Conze, Hartmut Boockmann (ed.): Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas*. 10. Bände. Berlin 1993-1999.

Germans had the effect that almost all of them migrated to Germany after 1989, while somewhat fewer people from the Banat migrated due to widespread mixed marriages with spouses with local roots. According to the census of 2011, the community with the largest share of Germans is Petrești (German: Petrifeld) with a German population of 27 %, of which less than a third declared German as its native language. It is located in Satu Mare area (German: Sathmar) in Northwest Romania. The Satu Mare Swabians (*Sathmarer Schwaben*) have also strongly linguistically assimilated to the Hungarian majority, but still prefer to describe themselves as German, not least for reasons of prestige. Like the Banat Swabians, the Satu Mare Swabians settled in this area in the 18th century. Both groups can be regarded as regional sub-groups of the primarily Catholic “Danube Swabians”, the group of settlers, who settled in Hungary starting in the early 18th century after the Great Turkish Wars.

#### TRANSYLVANIA

The Transylvanian Saxons are the most significant and tradition-rich group of Germans on Romanian territory nowadays. Their beginnings can be traced back to medieval Hungary. Transylvania, which is located in the middle of Romania today, was part of Hungary until 1918. In order to economically develop the region and to secure it militarily, the Hungarian kings recruited colonists. The first Hungarian king – King Saint Steven –, who was crowned in 1000, already warned his son: “A country that only has one language and one set of customs is weak and fragile”. Therefore one must treat settlers from different countries decently.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> György Györffy: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft der Ungarn um die Jahrtausendwende.

The large-scale settlement of western colonists began in Transylvania around the mid-12th century and lasted until the late 13th century. The beginnings of the German linguistic enclaves in Transylvania therefore coincide chronologically with the gradual advance of the German language into present-day eastern Germany to the east of the Elbe River.<sup>6</sup> The city of Sibiu (German: Hermannstadt) founded by settlers in southern Transylvania was first mentioned in documents in 1191<sup>7</sup>, several decades earlier than Berlin. Attracted by tax exemptions, land grants and legal privileges, the primarily German-speaking settlers were all called “Saxons”, which did not refer to their origin, rather was a conventional designation for privileged settlers from the west. The German-speaking inhabitants of Transylvania therefore still call themselves Saxons up to today.<sup>8</sup> One primary area from which the migrants came must have been the Moselle-Franconian-Luxembourgian region, although settlers also came from other regions. Initially only the surroundings of Hermannstadt (Sibiu) were called “Siebenbürgen” [literally:

Wien, Köln, Graz 1983, p. 259.

<sup>6</sup> Konrad Gündisch: Siebenbürgen und die Siebenbürger Sachsen. München 1998, pp. 33-37; for the settlement based on German law in comparative perspective, see for example the studies by Jan M. Piskorski (ed.): *Historiographical approaches to medieval colonization of East Central Europe. A comparative analysis against the background of other European inter-ethnic colonization processes in the Middle Ages*. Boulder, New York 2002; Thomas Nägler: *Die Ansiedlung der Siebenbürger Sachsen*. Bukarest 1979.

<sup>7</sup> Harald Roth: *Hermannstadt. Kleine Geschichte einer Stadt in Siebenbürgen*. Köln, Weimar, Wien 2006, pp. 4-6; Franz Zimmermann, Carl Werner (ed.): *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen. Erster Band: 1191 bis 1342, Nummer 1 bis 582*. Hermannstadt 1892, pp. 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Konrad Gündisch: *Siebenbürgen und die Siebenbürger Sachsen*. München 1998, p. 30.

seven castles] (*septem castra*), even though the name originally had nothing to do with seven castles: this is a later folk-etymological reinterpretation, when the name had spread to the entire area also known as Transylvania, where seven administrative units of the Saxons, the nobility and the Székely respectively existed temporarily.<sup>9</sup> The Hungarians called the highlands of Transylvania, which are surrounded by tree-covered mountains on all sides, Transilvania (also Ultrasilvania), because when seen from the center of Hungary, the Pannonian lowlands, they lied beyond the wooded Transylvanian western Carpathian mountains (rum. Munții Apuseni). Along these lines, the Hungarians called the western part of their country to the right of the Danube Transdanubia.

The special legal status of the western, primarily German-speaking settlers in Transylvania was defined in 1224 in the so-called “Andreanum”, which later comprised an extended legal jurisdiction with extensive privileges and self-administration capacities.<sup>10</sup> King Matthias Corvinus approved the so-called “Nation University” (*Nationsuniversität*) in 1486, the legal community (*Rechtsgemeinschaft*) of the Saxons in all the free settlements in which they lived. They were spread like a patchwork all across Transylvania with three centers around Sibiu in the south (“Hermannstadt Province” or “Transylvania” in the narrower sense), in the Burzenland (Rom. Țara Bârsei) around Brașov (German: Kronstadt) in the southeast as well as the Nösnerland (Țara

*Năsăudului*) around Bistrița (German: Bistritz) in the North. The autonomy status definitively stipulated by these means essentially remained until 1876. It was the central foundation upon which the Saxons could sustain themselves as a legal community for several centuries, even though they were always a minority inside Transylvania and only in the majority locally. In the regional Diet of Transylvania, which was established in the late 13th century, the Saxons were one of three estates together with the nobility and the Hungarian-speaking Székely, and thus they controlled the political institutions from which the Romanians remained excluded.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the consistently carefully safeguarded legal autonomy, three factors were influential for the collective identity of the Transylvanian Saxons: the military, economic and confessional situation. The Saxons who settled in remote border regions fulfilled military defense functions time and time again – this was the basis of their privileges. Starting in the 15th century, the Ottoman wars and raids constituted a permanent danger. This was evident in the massive defense structures of the larger cities as well as the fortifications in nearly every village, usually in the form of so-called church fortresses (*Kirchenburgen*) (some of them are on the UNESCO World Heritage list). Just like the quote from Luther “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” (*Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott*), these church fortresses have

9 Gerhard Hochstrasser: Siebenbürgen – Siweberjen bedeutet Zibinumschließung – Cibinbürgen. In: Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde 21/1998, No. 2, pp. 192-195.

10 Franz Zimmermann, Carl Werner (eds.): Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen. Erster Band: 1191 bis 1342, Nummer 1 bis 582. Hermannstadt 1892, pp. 32-35.

11 A comprehensive description of the foundations of the Transylvanian socio-political system of estates in Béla Köpeczi, László Makkai (eds.): History of Transylvania. Vol. 1: From the beginnings to 1606. Boulder 2001 (Atlantic studies on society in change 106; East European Monographs 581); for a detailed overview of the legal status of the Transylvanian Saxons see Konrad Gündisch: Siebenbürgen und die Siebenbürger Sachsen. München 1998.



become an identity-forming symbol of the Saxons. These fortified churches surrounded by defense walls served not so much military purposes, rather to protect the people as well as their belongings.<sup>12</sup>

These generally wealthy settlements of Saxons were popular targets for looting, which in turn sheds light on the economic factor. The Saxon centers of long-distance trade and handicrafts Hermannstadt (Sibiu) and Kronstadt (Braşov) were two of the economically most significant cities of Hungary and generated great wealth through trade with the Orient.<sup>13</sup> Here and in other cities, a class of craftsmen, merchants and entrepreneurs developed, which was economically successful until their misappropriation by the Communists after the Second World War. As a result, the Saxons clearly differed from a social perspective from the Romanians, who formed the majority in Transylvania since the 18th century at the latest, but were legally disadvantaged and frequently were serfs. The Saxons, by contrast, were primarily free farm owners and constituted the bourgeoisie, which had a diverse system of clubs and societies (in the 19th century). For centuries, their autonomous status enabled their isolation from Romanian and Hungarian immigrants, including the nobility, in particular in the cities. Social as well as linguistic and ethnic divisions coincided, which was a decisive factor why the Saxons remained as a German-speaking group in a different language environment.

Their confession was ultimately also an

12 Hermann Fabini: *Die Kirchenburgen der Siebenbürger Sachsen*. Sibiu 2009; Robert Stollberg, Thomas Schulz: *Kirchenburgen in Siebenbürgen = Fortified churches in Transylvania*. Köln 2007.

13 For Braşov Paul Binder: *Handel, Wirtschaft und Industrie*. In: Harald Roth (ed.): *Kronstadt. Eine siebenbürgische Stadtgeschichte*. München 1999, pp. 112-121; Carl Göllner: *Siebenbürgische Städte im Mittelalter*. Bucureşti 1971, pp. 71-91.

additional factor. The reformation spread to the Transylvanian Saxons early, because they consistently had close contacts with the German-speaking area. For example, the Humanist Johannes Honterus (1498-1549) from Kronstadt (Braşov) worked for some time in Basel, where he printed the first map of Transylvania in 1532. After returning to his hometown, he became the reformer of the Transylvanian Saxons, who took on the Evangelical confession of faith based on Luther's teachings in 1545.<sup>14</sup> From this point on, they also differed with regard to confession from the other inhabitants of Transylvania, the Orthodox Romanians and the Hungarians, who remained Catholic or converted to other reformed faiths such as Calvinism. The Evangelical-Lutheran faith, the German language and to a great extent their special legal status as well had now practically become intertwined with one another. With their specific economic and social structure as well as their unified defense against external threats, they consolidated as a community based on a strong feeling of togetherness.<sup>15</sup> This

14 Harald Roth: Johannes Honterus. In: Joachim Bahlcke, Stefan Rohdewald, Thomas Wunsch (ed.): *Religiöse Erinnerungsorte in Ostmitteleuropa. Konstitution und Konkurrenz im nationen- und epochenübergreifenden Zugriff*. Berlin 2013, pp. 686-692; a detailed account of the reformation in Martin Armgart (ed.): *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts. Vierundzwanzigster Band: Siebenbürgen. Das Fürstentum Siebenbürgen. Das Rechtsgebiet und die Kirche der Siebenbürger Sachsen*. Tübingen 2012, einführender Überblick pp. 109-175.

15 The feeling of togetherness when faced with an external threat is exemplarily demonstrated by the figure of Michael Weiss, a Braşov/Kronstadt-based town magistrate who lost his life on the battlefield fighting against the tyrannical prince of Transylvania Gabriel Báthory. He is an important point of reference in the collective memory of the Transylvanian Saxons, see Maja Philippi: *Michael Weiss. Sein Leben und Wirken in Wort und Bild*. Bucureşti 1982.



was reflected, for example, in neighborhood institutions (local self-administration bodies). In the 19th century the early modern, class-based confessional structures evolved into a modern sentiment of nationhood based on ethnic-linguistic criteria.

Instead of local particularism, an overarching model of identification comprising all of Transylvania emerged. The Transylvanian Saxons aligned themselves increasingly closely with Germany, in particular after the creation of the German Empire in 1871, while at least the highly educated classes in the cities increasingly used standard German (*Hochdeutsch*) instead of the Transylvanian-Saxon dialects.<sup>16</sup>

However, Transylvania was geographically too remote and the Saxon settlement area too fragmented for any serious discussion of a political union with Germany. Transylvania's incorporation into Romania in 1918 was supported by the Saxons for pragmatic reasons.<sup>17</sup> In the 1930s many Transylvanian Saxons were radicalized by National-Socialism and during the Second World War the ruler of Romania Antonescu (1882-1946), a close ally of Hitler, granted the Germans in the country a special status, which largely subordinated them to Nation-Socialist Germany. After the invasion of the Red Army they were expelled in large numbers to forced labor in the Soviet Union, from where the survivors sometimes

only returned after several years.<sup>18</sup>

#### AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR: EMIGRATION

As a consequence of the Second World War, many German-speakers were forced to flee or were evacuated or expelled from the Baltics, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia and their presence was reduced to small remaining groups. In the Soviet Union the Germans under Stalin were subject to repressions and deportations to Central Asia. Since the late Tsarist era, there were several phases of Russification and stigmatization of the Germans, due to which their knowledge of the German language decreased over time. Romania is a special case in Eastern Europe, because the Germans were not expelled from the country, not least because Stalin was likely against this, as suggested by documents.

Amid the commotion of the Second World War, a small share of the Germans from Romania made it to Germany and remained there. After family reunifications began at a modest level, a growing number of Germans emigrated starting in the 1960s to escape from the repressive Ceaușescu regime. When the travel restrictions were abolished after he was overthrown in late 1989, around half of the remaining 200,000 Germans emigrated from Romania. The exodus continued in the following years at a slower pace. A disproportionate number of older people remained in Romania, while the younger generation is increasingly being absorbed by the surrounding majority population (or the Hungarian population at the local level). The approx. 36,000 remaining Germans according to the 2011 census therefore hardly still exist as a coherent community and it is uncertain how long the German identity and language

16 For the relationship between the Transylvanian Saxons and Germany see Sorin Mitu, Anca Gogăltan: Transylvanian Saxons' identity and the idea of German affiliation 18th – 19th century. In: Sorin Mitu (ed.): Building identities in Transylvania. A comparative approach. Cluj-Napoca 2014, pp. 55-70.

17 Harald Roth: Kleine Geschichte Siebenbürgens. Köln, Weimar, Wien 2003, pp. 122-124; Vasile Ciobanu: Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei sașilor transilvăneni, 1918-1944. Sibiu 2001, pp. 53-68.

18 See also the articles in this edition.

will be preserved in Romania in the long term. The Transylvanian Saxons have always been numerically in the minority, except for certain cities and villages where they constituted the local majority. Ever since the reforms implemented by Joseph II at the end of the 18th century, which affected the estate-based rights that the Saxons owed their privileged legal position to, fears of the end of the Saxon community have circulated, the so-called “*finis saxoniae*”.<sup>19</sup> The step-by-step restriction of their special legal status in the 19th century, the ethno-political upheavals caused by National-Socialism as well as the politics of national homogenization and social levelling under Romanian socialism are reasons why the century-long presence of German speakers in the region slowly seems to be coming to an end.

#### GERMAN CULTURE IN ROMANIA TODAY

The German language and German cultural influences are indeed still very present, not only in architectural monuments such as church fortresses, Central European old towns and “villagescapes” with the typical closed rows of houses. There is still an intact German school system and church community life in the larger centers with a German population. Public schools in various locations offer programs with German as the language of instruction in certain subjects at all levels from pre-school to university graduation. However, only a small share of the school children still comes from local German families. The pupils primarily come from Romanian and Hungarian families, because the German schools enjoy a good reputation and extensive

<sup>19</sup> Paul Philippi: Nation und Nationalgefühl der Siebenbürger Sachsen 1791-1991. In: Hans Rothe (ed.): Die Siebenbürger Sachsen in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Köln, Weimar, Wien 1994, pp. 69-87.



Stundturm in Sighișoara / Schäßburg.  
Photo Kathrin Biegger

knowledge of German is regarded as an advantage – in individual cases, Romanian families even communicate privately with their children in German as well.

Thus part of the German-speaking culture is still cultivated by Romanians and Hungarians nowadays. The remaining German minority has a good reputation and is associated with clichés such as diligence and seriousness. This is one of the reasons for the ascent of Klaus Iohannis to President of Romania. As an outsider, he was elected mayor of Hermannstadt (Sibiu) four times with an overwhelming majority since 2000, while the political representation of the German minority has had an absolute majority in the city council

since 2004, even though only somewhat more than one percent of city's population claims to belong to the German minority. The success of the German Forum<sup>20</sup>, which is seen as being a party of integrity in contrast to the established parties, remains restricted to the district of Hermannstadt (Sibiu) and was not replicated to the same extent in other centers of the German population. Nevertheless, Iohannis succeeded in winning over a majority of Romanian voters, not least due to the stereotype of the honest and hard-working German.

*Translated by Michael Dobbins*

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<sup>20</sup> *Demokratisches Forum der Deutschen in Rumänien* (Democratic Forum of the Germans in Romania), the interest representation of the Germans in Romania, website <http://www.fdgr.ro/de/>; see also the article by Benjamin Józsa in this edition.

# Andreas Schmidt and the German Ethnic Group in Romania (1940 – 1944)

by Ottmar Trașcă, Cluj-Napoca

The worsening domestic and international situations of Romania in the summer of 1940, as a result of the effects of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, military victories achieved by the Wehrmacht in the West, as well as territorial concessions to the USSR, Bulgaria and Hungary, were ably speculated by the leadership of the Third Reich, which compelled the government in Bucharest to make new economic and political concessions, including the “regularization” of the status of the German minority in Romania, in accordance with Berlin’s projects for this geographical area. As a result, concomitant with the outcome of the Second Vienna Arbitration on August 30, 1940, the head of the German Foreign Office, Joachim von Ribbentrop, compelled the Romanian Foreign Minister, Mihail Manoilescu (1891-1950), to sign an agreement covering the legal status of the German minorities within Romanian territory. The Romanian authorities agreed: 1) to treat the members of the German Ethnic Group “equally in all aspects”; 2) to ensure their ability to develop their German character, according to the 1918 Alba-Iulia declarations.<sup>1</sup>

The implementation of the August 30, 1940 agreement would be aided by important events in Romania the following September to November: King Carol II’s (1893-1953) abdication, General Ion Antonescu’s (1882-1946) assumption of power together with the Legionnaire Movement / Iron Guard (the so-called “National-Legionary” regime, from Sept. 1940 to Jan. 1941), the arrival of the German Military Mission, and last

but not least, Romania’s signing on to the Tripartite Pact (November 23, 1940). These developments irreversibly placed Romania within Germany’s sphere of influence and, therefore, afforded Berlin the opportunity to determine the fate of the ethnic Germans in Romania. The first consequence was the replacement of the old leaders—those thought “moderate”—with radical national-socialists who would be obedient to and ready to follow unconditionally the orders they received from the Reich. Thus, the leader of the German minority, Dr. Wolfram Bruckner (1903–1979), was replaced on September 22, 1940 by a rapidly rising figure, Andreas Schmidt (1912–1948).<sup>2</sup> This young man’s appointment—28 years-old, unremarkable, lacking political experience, but well connected with the upper leadership of the SS<sup>3</sup>—had sinister consequences for the German minority in Romania in the following four years. Following commands received from the “Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle/Central Office for Ethnic Germans from Abroad,” Andreas Schmidt, shortly after taking power, embarked on a reorganization of the German

<sup>1</sup> See the text of the agreement in *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945, Serie D: 1937–1945, Band X Die Kriegsjahre, Dritter Band 23. Juni bis 31. August 1940*, Frankfurt am Main, 1963, document 413, p. 484.

<sup>2</sup> Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității București [National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives], Information collection, folder 262164 (Andreas Schmidt), vol. 2, f. 7. Letter from 22.09.1940 to the head of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, SS-Obergruppenführer Werner Lorenz, addressed to Andreas Schmidt (cited hereafter as CNSAS).

<sup>3</sup> See Andreas Schmidt’s account of his life, written 06.02.1944, published by Paul Milata, *Der Lebenslauf des „Volksgruppenführers“ Andreas Schmidt*. In: „Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde“, 28. (2005), p. 70-76; According to the German historian Heinz Höhne, Andreas Schmidt was an “ultra-Nazi, a prototypical young fanatic, intoxicated with the cult of Hitler.” Heinz Höhne, *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf. Die Geschichte der SS*, München, Weltbild, 1984, p. 425.

minority's leadership structures, marking the official start of the "alignment" process (Gleichschaltung) of the German Ethnic Group in Romania, a process which included the adoption and faithful application of then-current German political, economical, and cultural models.<sup>4</sup> Thus, following agreements with the Iron Guard (the principal dialog partner within the National-Legionary government from September 1940 to January 1941), during a sumptuous ceremony held on November 9, 1940 in the Transylvanian city of Mediaș, the "National Socialist German Workers Party of the Ethnic Germans in Romania" (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei der Deutschen Volksgruppe in Rumänien [NSDAP der DVR]) was founded, at which occasion Andreas Schmidt presented the principles on which the new legal status of the German Ethnic Group would be based.<sup>5</sup> The appearance of a new, Nazi-based political formation for ethnic Germans contravened Romanian laws in effect at that time, which prohibited the creation of political

organizations and parties. This paradoxical situation is explained by the fact that approval of the status of the German Ethnic Group—as announced by Andreas Schmidt over the course of October 1940, and modified by common accord with the Council of Ministers Vice-President Horia Sima (1906-1993) in the first days of November 1940—was delayed by General Ion Antonescu until the second half of November 1940, in spite of repeated requests by the commander of the Legionary Movement.<sup>6</sup> In the end, on November 21, 1940, Decree-Law 3887<sup>7</sup> officially consecrated the German Ethnic Group and offered it extensive prerogatives, by declaring the organization a "Romanian legal entity by public law." Along with the fact that this decree legalized the functioning of the German Ethnic Group, the act offered the new German minority leadership, in this case Andreas Schmidt and his collaborators, the support necessary to organize the German Ethnic Group along the National-Socialist model, to place it under the leadership of the Third Reich, and last but not least, to remove opponents (real or imagined) to Nazi-style leadership. In the period that followed, as it extended its organizational structures into the entire community<sup>8</sup>, the German Ethnic Group (Grupul Etnic German [GEG]) quickly established almost total

4 Vasile Ciobanu, *Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei sașilor transilvăneni 1918-1944* [Contributions to the History of Transylvanian Saxons 1918-1944], Sibiu, Editura Hora, 2001, p. 238; see also references throughout Johann Böhm, *Die Gleichschaltung der Deutschen Volksgruppe in Rumänien und das 'Dritte Reich' 1941-1944*, Frankfurt am Main-Berlin-Bern-Bruxelles-New York-Oxford-Wien, Peter Lang, 2003.

5 For the internal and international contexts of the founding of the *NSDAP der DVR*, see especially Johann Böhm, *Das Nationalsozialistische Deutschland und die Deutsche Volksgruppe in Rumänien 1936-1944. Das Verhältnis der Deutschen Volksgruppe zum Dritten Reich und zum rumänischen Staat sowie der interne Widerstreit zwischen den politischen Gruppen*, Frankfurt am Main-Bern-New York, Peter Lang, 1985, p. 123-127; Vasile Ciobanu, *Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei sașilor transilvăneni 1918-1944* [Contributions to the History of Transylvanian Saxons 1918-1944], p. 238-239

6 CNSAS, Information holdings, folder 210107 (Horia Sima), vol. 3, f. 47. Letter from Horia Sima on 07.11.1940 to General Ion Antonescu.

7 *Monitorul Oficial* [Official Bulletin] number 275, 21 November 1940. Decree-Law 3884 of 20.11.1940 for the constitution of the Romanian German Ethnic Group.

8 See the German Ethnic Group structures described in Harald Roth, *Die deutsche Jugend in Siebenbürgen, 1939-1944*. In: „Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde”, 10 (1987), p. 60-69; Paul Milata, *Zwischen Hitler, Stalin und Antonescu. Rumäniendeutsche in der Waffen-SS*, Köln-Weimar-Wien, Böhlau, 2007, p. 80-95.



control over the public life of ethnic Germans in Romania.

As was to be expected, later events would generate (more or less openly) hostile reactions, not only from the Romanian authorities but also, especially, from the Lutheran and Catholic churches. As a consequence, Andreas Schmidt's ascent to power was followed, after a campaign personally organized by the new GEG leader, by the removal or marginalization of notable figures in the German minority and church leadership—avowed opponents of National-Socialism such as the Lutheran bishop Viktor Glondys (1882-1949), the Episcopal Bishop Friedrich Müller (1884-1969), and Hans Otto Roth (1890-1953)—and their replacement by people obedient to Bishop Wilhelm Staedel (1890-1971). As a result, the German Ethnic Group achieved, in a relatively short time, "alignment" and the total dispossession of the Transylvanian Lutheran Church of its traditional place in culture and education. Therefore, as a result of a step-by-step process, an institution that had been fundamental to the secular existence of the German community in Romania was transformed into an annex of the Nazi leadership of the German Ethnic Group. The process of reorganization and "alignment" initiated by the new leader of the GEG was also influenced by German intelligence agencies active in Romania. If under the mandate of Wolfram Bruckner the GEG leadership had collaborated closely with OKW/Amt Ausland/Abwehr, as lead by Admiral Wilhelm Canaris (1887-1945), Andreas Schmidt's appointment as head of the German minority was followed by a reorientation of its cooperation with German intelligence agencies. The new GEG leader opted for an even deeper collaboration with Amt VI-SD Ausland under the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA). Andreas Schmidt's decision, perhaps surprising at

first glance, is fully explained by the position of power and connections Andreas Schmidt had available within the SS leadership—through his family relationship with SS-Obergruppenführer Gottlob Berger (1896-1975)—as a result of his earlier collaborations with Amt VI of the RSHA. Likewise, Andreas Schmidt was active with RSHA Amt VI-Ausland in an "honorary" capacity as early as 1939, with the constant support of the fearsome head of the RSHA, SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich (1904-1942). Andreas Schmidt's intention to pursue intelligence cooperation with SD-Ausland instead of OKW/Amt Ausland Abwehr stemmed from the meeting of concerns shown by prominent leaders of the SS, especially Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945) and SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, to extend the Amt VI intelligence network abroad (including in Romania), to counteract the activity of OKW/Amt Ausland Abwehr, its rival intelligence agency. The period that Andreas Schmidt spent as head of the German minority would, in fact, prove extremely fertile for SD-Ausland's activity in Romania, with the GEG leader's indispensable support (political, logistic, financial) for the creation, extension, camouflage, and functioning of the SD-Ausland intelligence network in Romania. In the political context promoted by Andreas Schmidt and his leadership team, the project of transforming the Romanian German minority into a political and military instrument completely servile to the expansionist policy of the Third Reich included enlisting ethnic Germans within Romanian state territory into the Wehrmacht and Waffen SS. The Antonescu regime had long resisted pressure from Berlin to legalize the enlistment of Romanian citizens of German nationality, an attitude stemming from political and military considerations, as

well as, and not least importantly, a question of prestige. Even though it eventually proved necessary to concede to the Reich's pressure, Bucharest still attempted to preserve Romanian interests by every means possible, which caused many moments of friction in Romanian-German relations. The ethnic Germans' desire to join the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS stemmed, in the first place, from the difference in treatment they received in the Romanian army, antibolshevik sentiment, better net compensation in the German units, the attraction of Germany (even in the context of the repeated military defeats suffered in theaters of military operations during 1943-1944), community pressure, etc. The number of Romanian ethnic Germans—only in the Waffen-SS—has been determined at a minimum of 61,880 and a maximum of 65,240.<sup>9</sup> Romanian ethnic Germans in the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS fought in practically all military theaters of World War Two, with greater involvement on the Eastern Front, which explains their considerable casualties. According to published sources, between 8 or 9000<sup>10</sup> to 15,000<sup>11</sup> ethnic Germans in the Wehrmacht or Waffen-SS lost their lives either in battle or prison.

It is certain that the "Andreas Schmidt Era" was one of the most difficult periods in the history of the Romanian German minority. The dictatorial leadership of Andreas Schmidt and his collaborators in the German Ethnic Group—characterized by the elimination of

real or imagined opponents, subordination and "alignment" of traditional institutions, transformation of the GEG into an instrument of Third-Reich policy in this geographical area—profoundly impacted the Romanian German minority during World War Two. The effects of the Schmidt Era did not end with his removal from power, which occurred with Romania's ending its alliance with Germany on August 23, 1944, rather it continued to hamper the entire German community in the postwar period, with effects visible unfortunately even today.

*Translated by Sean Cotter*

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9 Paul Milata, *Zwischen Hitler, Stalin und Antonescu. Rumäniendeutsche in der Waffen SS*, p. 217.

10 Dorel Bancoș, *Social și național în politica guvernului Ion Antonescu* [The Social and the National in Ion Antonescu Government Policy], București, Editura Eminescu, 2000, p. 211.

11 Hans-Werner Schuster, „Der Wehrdienst der Rumäniendeutschen im Zweiten Weltkrieg”, In: *Siebenbürgische Semesterblätter*, München, 1987, Heft 1, p. 169.

# The Deportation of Germans from Romania to Forced Labor in the Soviet Union

by Hannelore Baier

## ABSTRACT

*The year 2015 marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deportation of women and men of German origin from Romania to forced labor in the Soviet Union. In January 1945 nearly 70,000 working-age persons were coercively transported to the Donbass. For those affected, it seemed to be a cloak-and dagger operation. However, documents show that the exploitation of "German laborers" for the reconstruction of the areas of the Soviet Union destroyed by the war was addressed by the Allies and meticulously planned by the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs (NKVD). Ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) as well as German citizens from all over Central Eastern Europe were deployed for reconstruction.*

In the first half of the 20th century, the deportations of groups of the population on the basis of their ethnic affiliation and their deployment as forced laborers took on new dimensions as a means of enforcing the political interests of those in power. Millions of Jews lost their lives during hard labour in Third Reich concentration camps. Yet millions of Soviet citizens were also exploited as foreign workers (Fremdarbeiter) for Nazi Germany. The deportation and the deployment of German laborers – both German citizens as well as ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) – as a potential reparation payment for rebuilding the Soviet Union was addressed during the preparations for the Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Allied Powers in Moscow (October 1943) as well as the Teheran Conference (November/December 1943), without an agreement being reached though. An accord on German reparation payments, including work carried out by Germans, was reached at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, thus one and a half months after the beginning of the roundup of German civilians from the areas to the east of the Oder and Neisse rivers.<sup>1</sup> Documents from Moscow

1 Georg Weber, Renate Weber-Schlenker, Armin Nassehi, Oliver Sill, Georg Kneer, *Die Deportation von Siebenbürger Sachsen in die Sowjetunion 1945-1949*, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau-Verlag, 1995; Band 1, *Die Deportation als historisches Geschehen*, p. 78.

archives (RGASPI<sup>2</sup>, GARF<sup>3</sup>) indicate that the deportation of German civilians for labor purposes by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) was planned and managed at the central level. Its execution began after the areas were "liberated" by the Soviet Army.

## STALIN'S COMMAND

In November 1944 a stocktaking of the Germans living in the operational area of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Ukrainian Front of Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia) was carried out. On 15 December, 1944, the results of this "counting of Germans" (*Deutschenzählung*) were presented by the People's Commissioner for Internal Affairs L.P. Berija to I.V. Stalin, the People's Commissioner for Defense as well as V.M. Molotov, the People's Commissioner for External Affairs.<sup>4</sup> The NKVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) had registered a total of

2 Pavel Poljan, „Internierung und Deportation deutscher Zivilisten aus den besetzten deutschen Gebieten in die UdSSR.“ *Berichte und Studien des Hannah-Arendt-Instituts für Totalitarismusforschung e.V. an der TU Dresden*, 35/2001, pp. 39-53.

3 Günter Klein, „Im Lichte sowjetischer Quellen. Die Deportation Deutscher aus Rumänien zur Zwangsarbeit in die UdSSR 1945“. *Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter*, 2/1998, pp. 153-162.

4 Klein, *Im Lichte sowjetischer Quellen*, 154.

551,049 persons of German ethnicity, among them 97,484 men aged between 17 and 45 years. The largest German community was located on Romanian territory and consisted of 421,846 people. The original intention was to only deploy men aged 17 to 45 to rebuild the destroyed industry in Ukraine. However, as it was assumed that some of the registered men were not suitable for work, a decision was made to also transport women aged 18 to 30 years along with them.

The “mobilization and detainment of all Germans capable of working, including men aged 17 to 45 years and women 18 to 30 years” with both German as well as other citizenships from Romania, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, and their transport to work in the USSR took place on the basis of the Secret Command No. 7161ss of the State Committee for Defence. It was signed by Stalin on 16 December 1944.<sup>5</sup> According to the directive, the coordination and organization of the mobilization were the responsibility of the NKVD. In order to execute the directive, the commanders of the Ukrainian Front and the deputy directors of the Allied Commissions (Alliierte Kontrollkommissionen) were supposed to establish contacts to the government authorities in the affected countries. The deportation order stipulates that the mobilized Germans are to be deployed for the reconstruction of the mining industry in the Donbass and the black iron metallurgy in the south. The last point in the 10-point command demanded that the mobilization be carried out in December 1944 and January 1945 and that the laborers arrive at their workplaces by 15 February 1945. Beria reported on the developments on 22 February 1945. According

to his report, 112,480 persons – 61,375 men and 51,105 women – were “mobilized, detained and transported for labor in the USSR” in the timeframe between 25 December 1944 and 31 January 1945. The largest share of them – 69,332 persons – were Germans from Romania.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE DEPORTATION OF THE ROMANIAN GERMANS

It is uncertain when the Romanian government was informed about the planned deportation. According to accessible files, General V.P. Vinogradov, the Vice-President of the Allied Commission for Romania, initially notified the Prime Minister’s staff orally. There is a record of the conversation on 3 January 1945 between the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs C. Vișoianu and Burton Berry, the political representative of the USA in Bucharest, during which he addressed the intention of the Soviet representative to “round up” citizens of German origin and “transfer them to Soviet Russia”. The roundup command, i.e. the order by the Allied Commission to the (then) Chairman of the Council of Ministers Rădescu to mobilize and detain the Germans who were able to work between 10 and 20 January, is only preserved as an annex to a letter from Berry from 6 January 1945. A first written protest by the Romanian government was sent to Vinogradov on 13 January 1945. It refers to the “worst devastation of all economic and administrative activities of the state” as a consequence of such a measure as “the obligation of the Romanian government [...] to monitor the interests of all its subjects, regardless of their ethnic origin”.<sup>7</sup> In a lively

<sup>5</sup> Klein, *Im Lichte sowjetischer Quellen*, 155; Stefan Karner, *Im Archipel GUPVI*, Wien, München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1995, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Klein, *Im Lichte sowjetischer Quellen*, 155-157.

<sup>7</sup> Archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fund 71-1939, E9, Volume 164,

written diplomatic correspondence between the USA and Great Britain, who were overtly blindsided by their partner's course of action, Churchill stated his opinion to Foreign Minister Eden on 18 January 1945: "Why are we making a fuss about the Russian deportations in Roumania of Saxons and others? It was understood that the Russians were to work their will in this sphere. Anyhow we cannot prevent them".<sup>8</sup>

Romanian authorities conducted the first registration of German citizens as well as Romanian citizens of German ethnicity in September 1944. Those affected interpreted it as preparation for the imminent deportation, which was unlikely though. Indications can be found in Romanian documents from late December 1944 and early January 1945 that Soviet officers demanded "tables with names, ages and professions" of Romanian citizens of German origin. In a public order by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the government inspection offices of the police dated 31 December 1944 a reference is made to the command by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers given by telephone on 19 December.<sup>9</sup> The public order provides details on the gathering procedure in accordance with the tables and specified age categories" and the transportation procedure – after the roundup command is specifically issued. In the first roundup commands, women with children aged under one year as well as persons with handicaps are named as the only exceptions.

pp. 43, printed in German in Weber et. al., *Die Deportation von Siebenbürger Sachsen...*, Volume 3, 126 et seq.

<sup>8</sup> Weber et. al., *Die Deportation von Siebenbürger Sachsen...*, Vol. 3, p. 166.

<sup>9</sup> Hannelore Baier, ed., *Deportarea etnicilor germani din România în Uniunea Sovietică 1945*, Sibiu, p. 37 et seq.

Women who are married to Romanian men, children with a Romanian parent or parent of another nationality, professionals who are irreplaceable in businesses, nuns, monks, and pastors are exempted from the measure in later orders. These additions to the original orders partially did not reach the persons authorized with the detainment until the people were already being transported in cattle wagons to the USSR. In some places mixed Soviet-Romanian patrols carried out the roundups, while in other places the Romanian gendarmes or police were sent out alone. The conviction is embedded in the collective conscience of the generation that experienced these events that the Soviet Union required laborers and that Romania supplied "the Germans". This view was reinforced by the sweeping measures of persecution indiscriminately carried out against Romanian Germans.

The roundup command for Romania stipulated that the Germans capable of work were to be mobilized between 10 and 20 January. In some regions members of the Romanian and Soviet military and police took brutal actions and people below and above the specified age limits were also arrested. People with illnesses or people who had a German name, but did not consider themselves German, were also transported away. In other places, verifications were carried out and people who did not correspond with the defined criteria were freed. Some people were taken off the street and detained, while others were able to bring warm clothing, bed sheets, eating utensils and food with them after the roundup command was announced. According to note dated 2 February 1945, a total of 21 trains with 10 to 60 (cattle) wagons full of "rounded up and wagonned Saxons" departed from the operational area of Kronstadt/Braşov (which



comprised all of southern Transylvania) between 16 and 29 January.

The number of Romanian Germans deported to the USSR for reconstruction activities or “Aufbauarbeit”, which was the official term used later, is likely to have been slightly under 70,000: according to a comprehensive report from the office of the Romanian Prime Minister in 1947, which compiles data from the Ministries of Internal and Foreign Affairs, 70,148 Romanian citizens – the large majority of them of German origin – were sent to work in the Soviet Union in 1945. They were joined by 300 German citizens from two prison camps. In a statistic regarding the “mobilized and detained (ethnic) Germans” from the Soviet authorities from March 1946, the number of Romanian Germans was stated to be 53,946 (27,680 women and 26,266 men).<sup>10</sup> This figure may be correct, because the first approx. 8,000 persons who had become disabled were brought home in the late autumn of 1945, while further movements of sick persons were carried out in February 1946. There were very many deaths in the winter of 1945/1946 (due to starvation, illness and work accidents). The “mobilization” was stated to be a wartime measure. However, it can be assumed that the labor assignment was intended for the duration of a five-year plan. Those who were able to defy disease, hunger and heavy labor came home in late 1949. Relatively exact figures on the death rate can be obtained from the Transylvanian Saxons and the three-volume book published by Georg Weber and his colleagues<sup>11</sup>. Ten percent of the approx.

30,000 deported persons died during the deportation, while an additional two percent died during the journey back or immediately after arrival. Three times more men died than women. The death rate varies according to the camp and work place and with regard to the places of origin depending on the random course of action taken during the roundup or the compliance with the age limits, which were exceeded upwards or downwards in some places.

#### THE EFFECTS

Between 14.5 and 20 percent of the German community was deported from the administrative districts with a Transylvanian-Saxon population. Children and older people remained behind. For example, 455 deported persons left behind 333 children in Sighișoara (Schäßburg). The deportation to Russia became embedded in the conscience of the German community as the moment of the breach of trust to Romania, even though the misappropriation of their entire property in rural regions carried out by the first communist-dominated government in March 1945 had even more profound consequences for the social structure and transformation of the communities.

In the note of protest to the Allied Commission, the Romanian government referred to the consequences of the displacement of laborers on the country's economy. On 19 February 1945 Vinogradov sent an order to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers to immediately put the Germans who eluded the “mobilization” in work battalions and to deploy them to labour assignments inside the country. Due to their ethnicity, Romanian Germans were subject to various forms of forced labor in different parts of the country up to 1948.

<sup>10</sup> Karner, *Im Archipel GUPVI*, p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Prof. Dr. Georg Weber (1932-2013), theologian, sociologist, and specialist in other disciplines at the Westfälische Wilhelms University of Münster, primary area of research: sociology of migration.

Ceaușescu and Romanian continuously praised themselves for having been the only country in the Eastern Block from which the Germans were not expelled from during the Second World War and in the immediate aftermath. Policy-makers at that time would have liked to have done so, but there were disagreements between them and they simply missed the right moment. When the request by the German government to evacuate Romanian Germans was addressed by the Council of Ministers in September 1944, an agreement was reached to consent to it in principle and carry it out “when the circumstances enable it”. At that point in time, expelling Germans was out of the question, because the area was already a theater of war. Only the representative of the Communist Party voted against expelling the Germans – and it can be assumed that he did so at the request of the Soviets. He stated as a reason that the evacuation would give Germany a new supply of persons and goods.<sup>12</sup> It is unclear why Romania did not request the expulsion of the Germans at the Potsdam Conference. Negotiations were held in October 1944 in the Council of Ministers regarding the revoking of Romanian citizenship from those who exhibited disloyalty to the Romanian state. However, no such directive was passed. In 1946, part of the leadership of the Communist Party exerted demands for their expulsion during the peace negotiations in Paris and aimed to gain Stalin’s consent for this (in the context of talks regarding the upcoming elections). Stalin declined: “The war is over.

12 National Archive of Romania (Arhivele Naționale ale României), Fund of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, Chancellery, vol. 7/1944, pp. 9-10, partial printing in Romanian in Hannelore Baier (ed.): *Germanii din România 1944-1956*, Sibiu: Editura Honterus, 2005, pp.58-59.

It has become difficult to expel them.”<sup>13</sup>

#### SUMMARY

For the German community in Romania, the deportation of working-age women and men to the Soviet Union in January 1945 signified a breach of trust by the Romanian government, because it implemented the measure ordered by Stalin. One was not aware of the many thoughtless followers in National-Socialist Germany and that their conformity was punished. The deportation order affected all “Germans” due to their ethnic affiliation and no distinction was made between National-Socialists and their opponents. The German minority was not expelled from Romania. However, after the reversal of weapons of 23 August 1944 disciplinary measures were applied against them, which were accompanied by hateful slogans, but no efforts to systematically address and elucidate the National-Socialist atrocities.

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*Translated by Michael Dobbins*

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Hannelore Baier, born in 1955, studied psychology in Klausenburg/Cluj. Since 1990 she has conducted research on the German minority in Romania as a hobby. She was the full-time editor of the *Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung* in Rumänien until retiring in autumn 2014. She is the editor of several source books and author of academic articles on the history of the German minority in Romania.

Book publications (selection):

Editor of the document collections: *Deportarea etnicilor germani din Romania in Uniunea Sovietica 1945* [The deportation of Romanian Germans to the Soviet Union in 1945] Sibiu/Hermannstadt 1994; and *Germanii din Romania 1944-1956*, [The Germans in Romania 1944-1956] Hermannstadt/Sibiu 2005

Co-author of the schoolbook *Geschichte und Traditionen der deutschen Minderheit in Rumänien* (History and Traditions of the German Minority in Romania). Textbook for the 6th and 7th grade.

Co-author of *Kauf von Freiheit* (Purchase of Freedom) Interviews with Dr. Heinz-Günther Hüscher on family reunions/ransom for Romanian Germans. Hermannstadt/Sibiu 2013

Collaborator on the source book *Die Deutschen in Rumänien 1944-1953* (The Germans in Romania) Böhlau 2015

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# The Deportation of the Romanian Germans to Forced Labor in the Soviet Union 1945-1949: The example of the siblings Elisabeth and Johann Weber from Hodoni in the Banat

by Günter Klein, Freiburg

The deportation of the Romanian Germans to forced labor in the Soviet Union, a topic which was sidelined in the West and East before the political transformation in 1989, has now been the subject of thorough research. This is primarily due to the access to Romanian and Russian archives since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. Among a series of historical and sociological analyses based on Romanian and Russian archive material, the works of Hannelore Baier, Georg and Annemarie Weber, Pavel Polian, as well as most recently Annemarie Weber are highly worthy of mention<sup>1</sup>. The structural and political history has been well researched and relevant sources have been published. Yet what about the experiences of those affected? In the families of previous deportees there was an oral form of narrating and remembering despite the public tabooization of the issue of forced labor. After 1989 such reports were put in writing and then published in the numerous homeland chronicles. However, a systematic scientific evaluation has yet to be carried out. Therefore, the aim of the present paper is to reconstruct the deportation process on the basis of self-testimonies by exemplarily analyzing the memories of the siblings Elisabeth (1925-2014) and Johann Weber (1926-2003) from Hodoni. In doing so,

1 Hannelore Baier: *Deportarea etnicilor germani din România în Uniunea Sovietică 1945, Sibiu 1994*; Georg Weber, Renate Weber-Schlenker, Armin Nassehi, Oliver Still, Georg Kneer: *Die Deportation von Siebenbürger Sachsen in die Sowjetunion 1945-1949*, 3 Bde., Köln, Weimar, Wien 1995; Pavel Polian: *Ne po svoei volye. Istoriia i geografiia prinuditel'nykh migratsii v SSSR*, Moskva 2001; Annemarie Weber (ed.): *Die Deutschen in Rumänien 1944-1953. Eine Quellensammlung*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2015.

I will draw on the personal files of both of them from the Center for the Conservation of Historical Documentary Collections (CChIDK, later incorporated into the RGVA – Russian State Military Archives), Russian and Romanian sources, personal recordings, photographs and oral history interviews with both contemporary witnesses.<sup>2</sup>

## ROUNDUP AND TRANSPORTATION TO THE SOVIET UNION

In January 1945, Elisabeth (born 1925) and Johann Weber (born 1926) lived in their hometown of Hodoni in the western Romanian Timiș-Torontal district, the part of the historical Banat, which was given to Romania from the bankruptcy assets of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy after the First World War. Hodoni is located 20km to the North-West of the district city of Timișoara and belongs to the municipality of Satchinez. Hodoni was a multi-ethnic village in 1945. The inhabitants of the village were Germans, Romanians, Hungarians and Roma. At the time of the deportation, somewhat more than half of the then 1,300 inhabitants were Germans (Banat Swabians). Elisabeth attended the teacher training school of Timișoara, while Johann (Hans), her one year younger brother, attended the upper secondary school (Gymnasium) known as "Banatia" in Timișoara. Their parents owned a small farm and led a modest life. Therefore they decided to send their children to advanced secondary schools in order to enable them a better future.

2 The author is the son of Elisabeth Weber. After studies in Eastern European History he dealt with the history of his family. As a relative, he has access to the family's knowledge base.



Hodoni 2014. Former German *Volksschule*, today Romanian elementary school.  
Photo Günter Klein

During the war years, Elisabeth and Johann were still in school. Elisabeth initially visited the Evangelical Teacher Training School in Sighișoara in Transylvania. Afterwards she switched to Timișoara. Her brother attended the "Banatia" school in Timișoara. Nobody from their family served in the German or Romanian Army. Their father, Karl Weber (1895-1974), a veteran of the First World War, was already too old for military service.

Elisabeth and Hans were not entirely surprised by the imminent deportation. They indeed were not aware of the "countings of Germans" (*Deutschenzählungen*), which took place in autumn 1944 in the hinterland of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Ukrainian Front, or of Stalin's deportation order no. 7161 from 16 December 1944.<sup>3</sup> However, Elisabeth remembered in 1995: "On 14 Januar 1945 – it was a Sunday – what

3 Günter Klein: Im Lichte sowjetischer Quellen. Die Deportation Deutscher aus Rumänien zur Zwangsarbeit in die UdSSR. In: Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter 47(1998), pp. 153-162.

spread as a rumor among the German population of our village Hodoni and triggered fear and uncertainty became true. Based on lists which were compiled in the community center, the henchmen went from house to house during dawn and ordered the people to be at the large community hall with some luggage before noon. This pertained to German men aged 17 to 45 years and German women aged 18 to 31 years."<sup>4</sup>

Evidently there were some "open gaps" in the lists which were compiled by the

Romanian authorities. Johann Weber later remembered the beginning of the deportation as follows:

"The (true) rumor already spread in the Swabian villages of the Banat that people had spoken with ethnic Germans from Yugoslavia at the train station of the district city of Timișoara, who were dragged away in cattle wagons to the Soviet Union. None of us wanted to believe that we would be deported, as we were loyal citizens of the Romanian state, who exemplarily fulfilled our duties towards the state."<sup>5</sup>

According to Stalin's deportation order from 16 December 1944 all Germans located on the

4 Elisabeth Klein (born Weber): Erinnerung an meine Deportation aus Rumänien in die Sowjetunion, Rastatt, Januar 1995 (unpublished manuscript), p.1.

5 Johann Weber: Erinnerung an die Zeit der Zwangsverschleppung der Volksdeutschen aus Rumänien in die Sowjetunion 14.01.1945-13.11.1949, Rastatt, January 1995 (unpublished manuscript), p. 1.



territories of Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic which had been liberated by the Red Army, were to be brought to work in the USSR.<sup>6</sup> The wording of the command was as follows:

"All Germans living on Romanian, Yugoslav, Hungarian and Czech territory liberated by the Red Army and who are capable of working, including men aged 17 to 45 years and women 18 to 30 years, are to be mobilized, detained and sent to work in the USSR."<sup>7</sup>

This pertained to a total of 69,332 persons from Romania (36,590 men and 32,742 women)<sup>8</sup>. However, the authorities did not entirely adhere to age categories, as Elisabeth Weber told later: "There were also raids, as a result of which 16-year old boys, 17-year old girls, and men over 45 years were also taken away."<sup>9</sup> The ethnic affiliation (only Germans were to be deported) was not exactly applied as a criterion for deportation: "I also must mention that a girl named Juliane Geiser, who had a German name but did not speak a word of German, was taken away from Mailat, a village in which only Hungarians lived."<sup>10</sup>

The Weber siblings were initially able to elude the roundup: "We learned about the measure from a neighbor at the last minute. We fled through the gardens and hid in the cellar of an old lady. My father explained to the "delegation" that we were visiting the neighboring village Becicherecu Mic. He was immediately ordered to bring us back. After we had not reported back by the next day,

they took my father as a hostage<sup>11</sup> and also threatened to take my mother<sup>12</sup>. My brother Hans, born in 1926, and I, born in 1925, decided to report back in order to spare our parents an unknown fate. On Tuesday morning we reported to the community hall. Shortly after, all people present in the hall were loaded on horse-drawn vehicles and brought to Vinga."<sup>13</sup>

Vinga is located approx. 20 kilometers from Hodoni along the railway line Timișoara-Arad. The rounded up people were registered in Vinga and "put in a hotel where we slept on the floor".<sup>14</sup> The Soviets took over the rounded up people in Vinga. "Until January 19th ethnic Germans from the following places - Bărateaz, Pișchia, Hodoni, Colonia Mică, Sânpetru Mic, Satchinez, Carani, Orțișoara, Secean and Vinga - were brought to this collection point."<sup>15</sup>

The relatives of the rounded up people also travelled to Vinga later to say goodbye. "There were heart-breaking scenes when saying farewell to our parents and siblings. For some, the goodbyes were forever. Fifty years later I still have a picture in my head of a woman clinging to her three children; one on her left arm, the other on her right arm, while she was holding the other one on her skirt. Not only she and her children were crying at the sight of this scene, but everyone around her. A soldier took the children away from her, gave her a push and she had to march along towards the train station. The children were given to the grandmother."<sup>16</sup>

Elisabeth Klein remembers the tumultuous scene that played out in Hodoni before the people were transferred to Vinga: "The

6 Klein, *Im Lichte sowjetischer Quellen*, p. 155.

7 GARF Moscow, op. 9401, d. 68, p. 153. Original in Russian, translation by the author.

8 Polian, p. 211.

9 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 1.

10 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 2.

11 Karl Weber was born in 1895.

12 Elisabeth Weber (née Karl) was born in 1902.

13 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 2.

14 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 2.

15 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 2.

16 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 3.

soldiers<sup>17</sup> who watched over us wanted to prevent us from saying goodbye to our relatives. My mother was the first to break through the chain of watchmen and many followed her example.”<sup>18</sup> She describes the conditions in Vinga as follows: “In Vinga we were put in a large hall. Other Germans from other municipalities located in the district Vinga joined us. We remained there for three days, men and women in one room. During this stage we were registered by members of the Red Army. From then on we were subordinate to the Soviet Army.”<sup>19</sup> The deported people regarded the Soviet soldiers who watched over them as members of the Red Army. In reality they were members of the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), who could only be recognized as NKVD members by their blue collar insignia and the blue hats of the officers. “When we marched to the train station escorted by armed soldiers, the bells of the catholic church rang. This sound reminded me of death bells— for many it was the final death bells.”<sup>20</sup> In Vinga the deported people were loaded onto cattle wagons. No consideration was given to family ties. “At the station, 30-40 people were crammed together in one wagon. We were counted just like cattle – man and women in one wagon without any regard to loading parents with children or siblings in the same wagon.”<sup>21</sup> The hygienic standards during transport were extremely primitive. “There was a hole in the bottom of the wagon which served as a toilet. We set up a toilet stool with bars which our parents passed to us through

the hole or through the grids on the window. There was someone who offered his blanket to make a curtain for the toilet stool. There was an oven in the wagon, but hardly any heating fuel. We switched our positions during the ride, as it was warm on the bottom and hot on top. During the 18-day trip, we did not have any opportunity to wash ourselves properly and were only able to use water from bottles on the toilet stool.”<sup>22</sup> Elisabeth Weber also reported similarly about the journey: “Cattle wagons stood at the train station to transport us away. Up to 40 people were crammed in one wagon. There was a hole in the middle of the floor of the wagon, which served as a toilet. The train usually only travelled at night. During the day it stood on the storage tracks of large stations.”<sup>23</sup> The journey took so long because priority was given to the troops and ammunition transporters of the Red Army. The Romanian railway routes mostly only had one track and the trains with the deported persons had to wait. “The journey took 18 days. During this period I only left the wagon once when we were reloaded into Russian wagons in Adjud. Here we were able to wash ourselves with snow. It had become clear to us at the latest here that we were being taken to the Soviet Union.”<sup>24</sup>

Regarding meals during the journey, Johann Weber recalls : “When the train stopped at the stations, several people were able to leave the wagon and go to the fountain under the surveillance of the guardsmen to get water. We were not given any warm meals during the journey. From time to time we made tea with the small oven. We ate exclusively what we brought with us from home. We were given black bread and smoked sheep meat

17 These are Romanian gendarmes.

18 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 2.

19 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 2.

20 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 2. In

this statement she is referring to the many deaths.

21 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 3.

22 Johann Weber: *Erinnerungen*, p. 3.

23 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 2.

24 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 3.

one time. We hung the sheep meat outside on the wagon and as soon as we arrived on Soviet territory it was stolen."<sup>25</sup> This was a pre-taste of the conditions in the deportation area, where the Russian and Ukrainian population was suffering from severe famine in their homeland which had been destroyed by war and the German occupation.

The Weber siblings also recalled people's attempts to flee during the journey. One such attempt was undertaken by five women from Hodoni near the city of Lugoj in the Banat. Two of them were caught and had to continue the journey in the guardsmen's wagon, "while the others fought their way back to our home village, but had to live in hiding for a long time. In exchange for the people who fled, the guardsmen randomly picked up other people at the stations. The number of deported persons had to be correct."<sup>26</sup>

#### ARRIVAL AT THE CAMP AND THE SETUP OF THE CAMP

"On 5 February we reached our destination, Stalino (nowadays Donezk). Fifty years later I still remember this day very well. We had to walk through a new little forest to the camp. The trees were completely covered with hoarfrost. It was like a fairytale in the Silver Forest (*Silberwald*). Every time that this memory comes back to me I wonder how I still could have eyes for the beauty of nature at that time. The camp consisted of three buildings – the women were placed in one and the men in the building across from it. The kitchen and canteen were located in the third building. The entire area was fenced in with barbed wire, and watchtowers were set up at the four corners. There were no toilets, which meant that we were forced to relieve ourselves

around the building. Later the camp detainees had to build latrines."<sup>27</sup>

Johann Weber also remembers his arrival: "On 5 February 1945 we arrived in Stalino in the Donbass. It was bitterly cold. We were unloaded not far from the coal mine 13 (mine shaft 13). Our luggage was loaded onto sleds. Several people were able to travel on the horse sleds. We had to march in columns to the camp under the surveillance of the guardsmen. We were accommodated in larger and smaller buildings in the camp. The camp was not fenced in, but was monitored by guardsmen. There was no toilet. Everyone relieved him or herself behind the house. Later we set up a latrine, and we were also the ones who fenced in the camp with triple barbed wire. A little wooden house was set up on timber scaffolding for the guardsmen at all four corners."<sup>28</sup> Regarding the conditions in the camp buildings, Johann

Weber reported: "We laid down on stick-sized pallets. We slept the first nights in our clothes and covered with our blankets. Later we were given straw mattresses."<sup>29</sup> He still recalls the hygienic measures in the camp: "On the second day after our arrival we had to go to the mine plant to be deloused (by steam). Yet to our astonishment many people were sitting on the wooden pallets two days later and cracking the lice that were in their shirts. Later the lice were joined by bugs, which kept us from sleeping. Even though we went to be deloused time and time again, we could not quickly get rid of the lice."<sup>30</sup> The head of the camp did not get this problem under control until 1947.<sup>31</sup>

The deported persons were registered once

25 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 4.

26 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 3.

27 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 3.

28 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 5.

29 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 5.

30 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 6.

31 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 12.

again at the camp and a file was created for each deportee (see annex 1,4,5 and annex 6,9,10). However, this did not take place until May 1945. Presumably they wanted to wait and see whether the deportees survived the initial phase in the camp. Pavel Polian indicates a death rate of 19.2 % for the entire time.<sup>32</sup>

#### EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE CAMP: WORK, HUNGER, DISEASE AND DEATH

"On the first days we sat around inactively on our wooden pallets. The people were gradually sent to do various jobs, mostly in the nearby sawmill. Here we had to drag heavy logs and were insulated in the worst way by the foremen, if we were not strong enough for the job. Soon the first men were sent to the coal mine. Then it was the women's turn. A medical examination was carried out before people were recruited as mineworkers. The "doctor" diagnosed me with tuberculosis. I was exuberantly happy about this wrong diagnosis, because it spared me from working in the mine."<sup>33</sup> In July 1945 Elisabeth Weber was moved to camp 1064, which was located in the settlement of Vetka. She worked at construction sites there, where she dug out foundations. Then she was involved in waste disposal and finally worked in the brick-making plant "*Shlaka-Beton*". "The construction sites were located rather far from the camp. We always had to go there by foot. In the winter we were supposed to dig the foundations. The ground was frozen rock-hard and we could only do anything with a pickaxe. It was bitterly cold and we did not have the proper clothing."<sup>34</sup> She remembered work at "*Shlaka-Beton*" as follows: "My work consisted of dragging bricks to the furnace.

One wet brick weighed 24 kg. My body weight was 42 kg at that time."<sup>35</sup>

Johann Weber was sent to work in the mine: "I was assigned to work in the mine and drove to the mine together with many other people for the first time on 15 March 1945. The coal mine 13 was located approximately 3 km from our camp. The coal mine was 217 meters below the ground. We worked in three shifts in the mine. Every mineworker had a day of rest after seven days. There were no holidays for us deportees. We were always accompanied by a guardsman and usually an officer as well on the way to the mine."<sup>36</sup>

Johann Weber recalls his work as follows: "Work in the coal mine was difficult - because the coal shaft was only 50-70 cm high (very good coal, anthracite), all work had to be carried out while lying down. I worked as a drillmaster and had to drill into the coal, after it was separated from the lower layer of stone with a milling machine (*vrubmashin*). The drilling holes were 180 cm deep and were blown up with 600 g of dynamite, in order to rip apart the layers. I lied on my stomach and pulled my shirt over my head while 20-30 holes were blown out behind me. The dynamite gas rose up above me towards the ventilation tract. Since I had to prepare coals for two layers as drillmaster, I sometimes spent 12 or even more hours in the mine. There was no toilet in the mine and everyone relieved himself where he thought he could not be seen. The only drinking water came from troughs into which it drizzled. It was water that was previously between the layers of stone and coal."<sup>37</sup> There are two certificates for Johann Weber's work as drillmaster (*buril'shchik*) in his personal file, including a

32 Polian, p. 210.

33 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 4.

34 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 5.

35 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 6.

36 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 6-7.

37 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 8-9.

*“trudovaia charakteristika”* (see annex 7 and 8). Besides the difficult working conditions and the attacks by parasites, the poor nutrition and permanent hunger also took a toll on both deportees. Elisabeth Weber wrote: “The mineworkers were somewhat privileged compared to others when it came to food. They received larger rations of bread and more millet and barley porridge for lunch. Sometimes there were also traces of meat in the porridges. Otherwise there was a sauerkraut soup three times a day or sour green boiled tomatoes, which were substituted by beet leaves in spring. What kept us alive and spared us from starvation was the bread.”<sup>38</sup> According to Johann Weber the “mineworkers were given 1200g of bread, and the construction workers 750g or 500g daily.”<sup>39</sup> He wrote about the toll that hunger took on him: When we came back to the camp from the nightshift around 1am, we ran to the kitchen and took potato peels which we then roasted on the stove plate. They tasted like cork. After that we drank water and could then sleep better, because our stomach was no longer empty.”<sup>40</sup> In view of this, the Soviet slogans written on the outer wall of the kitchen seemed to be pure mockery. For example, they stated “He who does not work should also not eat” or “Your diligence will speed up your journey home”.<sup>41</sup> They had to pay for their “food”. According to Johann Weber it amounted to 450 Rubles a month. “We were paid for our work, but many people did not earn 450 Rubles a month and had debt with the Soviet government when they travelled home.”<sup>42</sup>

38 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 4.

39 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 7. 1 kg of bread has approx. 2200 kcal. However, a miner is assumed to need 4600 kcal per day.

40 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 15.

41 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 15.

42 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 15.

Undernutrition and the insect plague automatically led to the breakout of epidemics. “In November a typhus epidemic broke out in our camp. Nearly all 60 women from our barracks simultaneously became ill. At that time we were still suffering from the insect plague. Our daily work was cracking lice. There was no other way of eliminating lice. Only after the epidemic did people begin to eliminate the lice by steaming clothes. I also was not spared by the disease. I laid on my pallet with a 40°C fever. I was not given any medicine. The paramedic measured the fever and asked whether I can still lift my head. I was only living off tea. And when I felt better, I traded my bread ration for an apple. Although I had the opportunity to “organize” potatoes in January 1946, I assorted the potatoes in a storage cellar and I was unable to fully recover anymore. I became weaker and weaker”.<sup>43</sup>

“The first people to die were men over 40. They could not withstand the strain and endure their hunger. In camp 1064 in the Vetka settlement, where I was after 1945, 7-8 men from Silesia and other (German)<sup>44</sup> eastern territories died on a daily basis. We women were supposed to fill the gaps.”<sup>45</sup>

Johann Weber recalls: “I personally became ill with dysentery in October-November 1946 and came to Smoleanka with other people<sup>46</sup> and was put in the so-called isolator. There were up to 15 of us lying in one room. We had one blanket to cover ourselves up. The room was indeed heated, but it was cold because the windows were not insulated. Those who did not lie near the oven froze. One man from Beşenova Nouă named Peter Buchert died in

43 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 6-7.

44 Remark by the author

45 Elisabeth Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 4-5.

46 He is referring to Smolianka. (Remark by the author)



the bed next to the oven. Before the bed had even cooled off, I was laid in it. We relieved ourselves in the vats located in the corridor. The dead, who were supposed to be buried the next day, laid on a wooden pallet next to the vats. I remember being overcome by chills when I had to relieve myself during the night and saw the body of the person who previously laid in my bed with pale toes. Thank God I recovered and had to go back to work again in the mine in December."<sup>47</sup>

Besides death from the illnesses that the deportees were subject to, deaths also occurred due to accidents. Elisabeth Weber reported about this: "There was no work safety. Nobody was informed about potential hazards. As a result, nine women were killed by falling rocks on one day in October 1946. While trying to protect themselves from relentless rain, they were sitting in niches under a rock when one side of the stone quarry collapsed. The rock masses buried them alive. The last bodies could only be recovered two days later."<sup>48</sup>

Johann Weber recalls a work accident in which two women, one from Satchinez and one from Orțisoara were shoved out of the coalmine elevator and fell 217m into the elevator shaft. "They only found body parts mutilated beyond recognition. They were collected in a straw bag and buried. It only became clear the next day who they were, because they did not return to the camp."<sup>49</sup>

"There were also mining accidents. It occurred that someone was crushed by a stone slab. In tunnel no. 1, in which I worked, the operator of the milling machine was killed by an electric shock, because he did not have any rubber gloves."<sup>50</sup>

47 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 10-11.

48 Elisabeth Weber, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 5-6.

49 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 8.

50 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 9.

The people who died in the camp were initially buried in an improvised cemetery. Their clothes were removed before burial and then used again. Johann Weber took part in such a burial: "On my first day of rest, my bed neighbor and I had to bury a woman, who died in the isolator of Smoleanka. Her name was Anna Hummel and she came from Covaci and was born in 1926. She laid naked on a two-wheel cart covered by a blanket. I would like to note that as soon as someone died his or her clothing immediately disappeared in the warehouse. We brought the corpse to the cemetery of Smoleanka and dug out a narrow, small grave with a pick and shovel. The ground was frozen up to 50-60 cm. We placed the corpse into the grave without a coffin and covered it with dirt. We had to bring back the blanket she was covered with. Otherwise, we would have landed in jail."<sup>51</sup>

"Later a cemetery was set up below the camp and the corpses that had strongly decayed had to be moved to other graves by the camp detainees. Those who did this work were given a double portion of food, even though they had lost their appetite after doing this work. These are painful experiences which one cannot forget. The dead also remain unforgotten, even though their graves were razed to the ground a long time ago. Twenty-five percent of the deportees from my village died."<sup>52</sup>

#### **RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LOCALS (LOCAL POPULATION, WORK COLLEAGUES, HEAD OF CAMP)**

During their stay in the Soviet Union the deportees had different experiences while living together with the local population. The deportees initially noticed the great poverty

51 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 11-12.

52 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p.12.

in the areas destroyed by the war. When the deportees traded their laundry and clothing from home for food, Elisabeth Weber realized that there must have been a great shortage of textiles, "because our things were in extremely high demand among the Russian population."<sup>53</sup> The first Russian words she learned were "karova" (cow) and "svinya" (pig). However, they were the most harmless curse words that their foremen hurled at them.<sup>54</sup> She also encountered helpful people during the harsh winter, though: "We often knocked on the doors of warm rooms. We usually were let in and sometimes the Russian women gave us hot tea."<sup>55</sup>

"While working in waste disposal in the summer of 1945, we cleaned the park of a children's home one day. The children – perhaps they were orphans – were all shaven bald and had light-blue aprons on. It was not possible to distinguish boys from girls. They also must have known who we are because they pressed their noses on the window panes and jeered: "Nyemki Frau, Fritz! Suddenly a child came out of the house. He was carrying a piece of bread under his apron that he gave to me."<sup>56</sup>

"While working in waste disposal in Smoleanka I was given a cup of sour milk and a pretzel by an older girl on two days. When I asked her why she does this, she answered: "German soldiers helped my mother and us children while our city was occupied." Later, when I was no longer working there, she sent 10 rubles by way of Ms. Meier, the supervisor.<sup>57</sup> Elisabeth Weber also worked with members of the Red Army, who were freed from German

captivity as prisoners of war, but could not go home because they were regarded as traitors. "At Shlaka-Beton I worked with men who were in German captivity and could not go back to their families after they were freed. They also lived in mass dormitories, but unguarded. The men came from the Transcaucasian Republics and Siberia. We got along with them well. They operated the machines and we ladies provided auxiliary services. When the men took a smoke break, we also were allowed to rest. They often asked us to sing German folksongs. The younger men among them spoke some German and were interested in learning more from us."<sup>58</sup>

As regards the relationship with his Ukrainian and Russian work colleagues, Johann Weber remembered: "We learned to curse in Russian first, because the mineworkers already were cursing before they said "hello".<sup>59</sup>

"I worked together with Russians in one shift. While the older miners sometimes broke off and handed me a piece of their bread with lard, the younger ones were very grumpy and nasty and prevented me from crawling by or even laid down on the electricity cable that I pulled along behind me."<sup>60</sup>

Regarding the head of the camp, Johann Weber recalls the following: "The head of the camp was a major named Vakulenk<sup>61</sup>, a small, fat man who was always neatly dressed. He always had a club in his hand that he prodded the ground with and said 'vot, vot nemetski svolotsh, domoi ne paidish, zdyes sdokhnish', which translates as 'German trash, you will croak here; you're

58 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 6.

59 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 9.

60 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 9.

61 The head of camp (nachal'nik) was named Vakulenko. The personal files of the deportees were signed by him (see Annex 1,2,3 und 4).

53 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 4.

54 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 4.

55 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 5.

56 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 5.

57 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 5.



Elisabeth Klein 1946 after surviving typhus. Her short hair is not for fashion purposes, rather due to the medical "treatment". She was shaved bald in order to prevent a head lice attack (lice carry the typhus virus).

not going home' I never saw him laugh."<sup>62</sup> "Major Vakulenkov, who wished us death, died of stomach cancer. We were assigned another head of camp named Morosov. He was an entirely different person. Everything became much more relaxed in the camp. We were allowed to go to the market under the surveillance of an attendant (guard) and buy something extra. Unfortunately most people did not have enough money. We were also driven by truck to the opera in Stalino, where we watched 'The Gypsy Baron'."<sup>63</sup>

#### THE REPATRIATION

After overcoming typhus, Elisabeth Weber kept deteriorating physically. "During the summer I had a circulatory collapse at work. When I

arrived at the camp after finishing work, the committee, which selected people to return home, was there. I was unfortunately not yet deemed as sick enough to be transported back. In November of 1946 I was so meager that I was assigned to the next group of people to be transported away. On 26 November I left the camp and went to my place in the cattle wagon at the train station of Vetka. I was joined by sick people from other camps. Our departure was set for 28 November and we hoped to spend Christmas at home with our loved ones."<sup>64</sup>

"There was a great sense of disappointment when we noticed that the train was not headed west towards Romania, rather to the north via Brest-Litovsk and via Warsaw to Frankfurt/Oder. After being deloused we travelled – this time in passenger trains that did not have windows – to Central Germany, to Thuringia, which was in the Russian occupied zone at that time."<sup>65</sup> (see annex 2) "We were put under quarantine for three weeks in Neustadt/Orla. In the meantime, we had received our certificate of discharge and were free, but left to our destiny without any money in the middle of a harsh winter. The Romanian government apparently did not want to take us back anymore."<sup>66</sup>

The Romanian government was apparently toying with the idea of first deporting the returnees from the Soviet Union to Germany, in order to later expel their relatives from Romania and thus solve the issue of the German minority. However, this is pure speculation. No Romanian sources exist regarding this matter. The fact is that all repatriated people were deported to the Soviet occupied zone in 1946. As of 1947,

62 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p.13.

63 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p.16

64 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 7.

65 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 7

66 Elisabeth Klein, *Erinnerungen*, p. 7.

the repatriates went back to Romania. Stranded entirely pennilessly in Germany, Elisabeth Weber wanted to return to her family in Romania by all means. To do so, she traveled to Bavaria in the American occupied zone, from where she was able to return to Romania through the repatriation camp for displaced persons in Pocking near Passau (there was a Romanian repatriation commission there).

Elisabeth Weber traveled back to her homeland



Johann Weber 1949 during “better days” briefly before his release as a proud owner of rubber boots which were from an American aid delivery. He looks healthy and well nourished, which was due to the fact that he was able to purchase additional food from the farmers’ market with his wage.

through the reception center in Oradea in western Romania. She was given the marching order (*Ordin deplasare la domiciliu*; see annex 3) to

her place of residence on 26 July 1946 in Oradea. Johann Weber still was subject to forced labor until the end of 1949. Even though he “faithfully complied with his norm” according to his labor characterization (see annex 7), this in no way sped up his return home, as the Soviet slogans claimed it would. Regarding the sentence: “Diligence will speed up your journey home”, it was clear to us that they only need people capable of working and whoever endured the work did not leave the camp until it was liquidated (4 November 1949).<sup>67</sup>

After five years of forced labor Johann Weber returned back to his home by way of the camp in Sighetul Marmației in northwestern Romania (on the border to Carpathian Ukraine). The Weber family was reunited in November 1949.

#### LIFE AFTER DEPORTATION

After deportation Elisabeth Weber visited the *Pädagogisches Lyzeum* (Pedagogical Upper Secondary School) in Timișoara, which she graduated as the best in her class in 1949. Although people suggested to her to study mathematics, she became a primary school teacher. She did not want to live anymore at the expense of her parents who were entirely misappropriated as “Hitlerists” and were now penniless. In 1950 she went to Satu Nou near Bistrița, which was located 400 km away in northern Transylvania. Here she taught at the German-language primary school. In 1954 she married the Transylvanian Saxon, Michael Klein, who had also returned from war captivity and was a primary school teacher as well. The couple had two sons, Werner (born 1955) and Günter (born 1961). As of 1954 she taught together with her husband at the German-language

67 Johann Weber, *Erinnerungen*, p. 15.



primary school in the district town of Bistrița.

The topic of deportation was an absolute taboo in communist Romania of the 1950s and 1960s. It was not until the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, Nicolae Ceaușescu, spoke somewhat nebulously at the 9th Congress of the RCP (19-24 June 1965) and the Council of Workers of German Nationality (10 February 1971) about “measures” which “unjustifiably affected many workers of German nationality”<sup>68</sup> that some Romanian-German authors dared to address this theme. In a book published by the Chairman of the Council of Workers of German Nationality, Eduard Eisenburger, the deportation was downplayed as a “temporary resettlement and obligatory reconstruction as well as other injustices which the German population experienced.”<sup>69</sup> This pertained to the deportation to forced labor in the Soviet Union as well as the deportation to the Bărăgan steppe in southeastern Romania. Repatriates from the Donbass were deported to the Bărăgan. However, not only Germans were deported to the Bărăgan steppe, but also Romanians and Serbs from the Banat.

In 1973 the years of labor in Ukraine were credited to Elisabeth Klein’s pension. She received a letter from the Bucharest Ministry of Labor which indicated that she carried out

<sup>68</sup> Monica Barcan, Adalbert Millitz: *Die deutsche Nationalität in Rumänien*, Bucharest 1977, p. 38.

<sup>69</sup> Eduard Eisenburger (ed.): *Sächsisch-schwäbische Chronik. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Heimat*, Bucharest 1976, p. 189.



Parents’ house of the siblings Weber. Photo Günter Klein

“reconstruction work” in the Soviet Union between 12 January 1944 and 26 November 1946 according to a notice from the Ministry for Social Insurances of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic from 12 January (see annex 11).

In 1976 she emigrated with her family to the Federal Republic of Germany and settled in Rastatt (Baden). She worked as a primary school teacher at the *Hansjakobschule* in Rastatt, before retiring in 1988. The deportation to forced labor remained the trauma of her life. She never forgot this injustice and humiliation. It hurt her that her suffering was hardly mentioned in public in Germany. On 29 July 2014, one day before her death, the Romanian government granted her a deportation pension of 200 Lei<sup>70</sup> for each year spent in the Soviet Union (see annex 12). Unfortunately she was unable to actively experience this – at least – moral compensation.

Johann Weber also became a primary school teacher. He taught at different village schools in his native Banat. He met his wife Susanne

<sup>70</sup> 4.40 Lei are approximately one Euro.

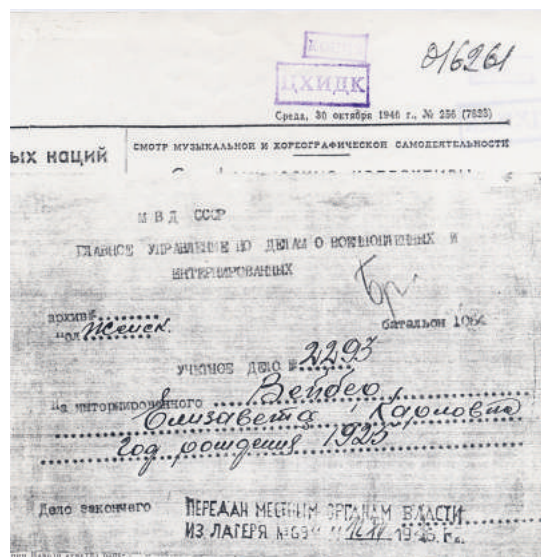


(born Grün) during the deportation. Their marriage remained childless. In 1978 he emigrated with his wife and his in-laws to the Federal Republic of Germany. He also settled in Rastatt (Baden), where he worked in the state reception center for late repatriates (*Spätaussiedler*). He retired in 1993 and died in 2003. The deportation had a hold on him for his entire life: "The past often catches up with me in my nightmares and I am happy when I wake up and the terrible dream is over."<sup>71</sup>

*Translated by Michael Dobbins*

## ANNEXES

**Annex 1** Personal file of Elisabeth Weber – Page 1  
Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR: Registered file of the Central Administration for Prisoners of War and Detainee Matters No. 2293 of the detainee (ИНТЕРНИРОВАННОГО) Veber, Elisabeta Karlovna, year of birth 1925, battalion 1064; admission to the battalion on 6 February 1945. The file was closed on 16 February 1946 (turnover on site to the authorities of camp no. 69



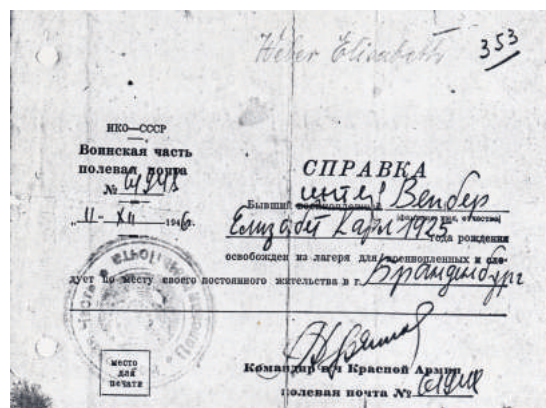
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Günter Klein M.A.\* 9 October 1961 in Bistrița/Romania. Relocation to Rastatt (Baden-Württemberg) in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1976. Studies in Eastern European history as well as recent and modern history and Slavic languages at the Albert-Ludwigs University of Freiburg 1986-1991.

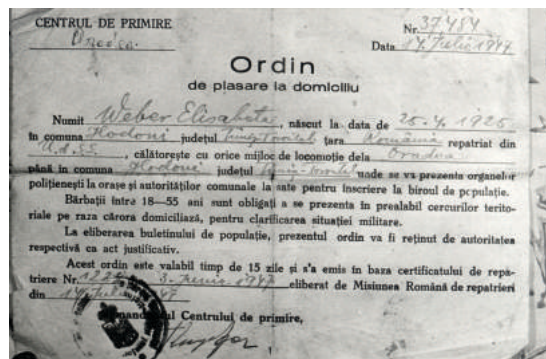
Lives as a freelance historian and journalist in Freiburg. Author of several articles on Romanian military history.

e-mail: klein-noesen[at]t-online.de

**Annex 2** Certificate of discharge for the former detainee Veber, Elisabet Karl, born 1925 (the word war prisoner is crossed out on the form and substituted with Int., thus detainee) according to which she was released in Brandenburg on 11 December 1946.



**Annex 3** March order to the place of residence (Ordin de plasare la domiciliu) for Elisabeth Weber from 14 July 1947 according to which she must leave the "reception center" Oradea (Centrul de primire Oradea) and return to her place of residence.



## Annex 4 Personal file of Elisabeth Weber – Page 2

## Questionnaire for the detained person

Information on the family, the social situation (origin), financial situation, nationality, confession of faith, party affiliation, mother language, languages spoken, citizenship, profession, education, stays in the Soviet Union;

ЛАВНОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ НКВД СССР ПО ДЕЛАМ О ВОЕННОПЛЕННЫХ И ИНТЕРНИРОВАННЫХ

четное дело № 195-255 Батальон № 1081 Дата прибытия в батальон 6 "февраля" 1949 г.

из австрийский

**ОПРОСНЫЙ ЛИСТ**  
на интернированного

Форма № 1

1	Фамилия	<u>Вейдере</u>
2	Имя и отчество	<u>Елизавета Карловна</u>
3	Год рождения	<u>1925 г.</u>
4	Место рождения	<u>Дунайская область, Австрийский район, село Садовки, дом № 284</u>
5	Последнее местожительство интернированного	<u>Дунайская область, Австрийский район, село Садовки, дом № 284</u>
6	Точный адрес, состав семьи (фамилия, имя и отчество жены, детей или родителей, род занятий)	<u>Отец - Вейдере Карл, социалист - 1896 года</u> <u>Мать - Вейдере Елизавета Ивановна - 1902 г.</u> <u>Дунайская область, Австрийский район, село Садовки, дом № 284. Земельный</u>
7	Соц. происхождение — сословие (имущественное положение родителей)	<u>Из крестьян. Дед — землевладелец, отец — рабочий, мать — домохозяйка, братья и сестры — крестьяне</u>
8	Имущественное положение интернированного	<u>Жива с родителями</u>
9	Национальность	<u>Австрия</u>
10	Вероисповедание (религия)	<u>Католический</u>
11	Партийность, если состоял, когда и где, сколько времени и причина выбытия	<u>Не состоял</u>
12	Родной язык	<u>Австрийский</u>
13	Перечислить какими языками владеет кроме родного	<u>Австрийский (читает, пишет)</u>
14	Подданство	<u>Австрийское</u>
15	Профессия и специальность (стаж работы) до интернирования	<u>Кладовщик</u>
16	Образование: а) Общее б) Специальное в) Военное	<u>Массов Народный школы, 6 кл. Знания, не имеет</u> <u>не имеет</u> <u>не имеет</u>
17	Проживал ли в Советском Союзе (где, когда и чем именно занимался)	<u>Не проживало.</u>

## Annex 5 Personal file of Elisabeth Weber – Page 3

## Questionnaire for the detainee (continuation)

Question regarding relatives in the Soviet Union, prison sentences, stays abroad;  
Date and time of the detainment 19 January 1945, Banat region, Timiș-Torontal  
Rayon, village Vinga; Portrait description and handwritten signature as well as  
the signature of the secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Byrko, A.I.

18	Кто из родственников и знакомых проживает в СССР (их фамилии, имена, отчества, возраст, место работы, род занятий, местожительство)?	Не проживают
19	Был ли под судом или следствием, когда, где, кем и за что осужден, где отбывал наказание?	Не была.
20	В каких других государствах бывал (кроме своей страны и Советского Союза). С какого и по какое время, чем занимался?	Не была.
12	Дата и место интернирования	19 января 1945 г. Румыния, Банатская область, Тимшо-Торонталский район, село Винга.
22	Перечислить подробно всю практическую деятельность до момента интернирования (с какого и по какое время и в качестве кого)	Учителька.

Подпись интернированного Weber Elisabeth  
 20. 11.1945 1945 г.

СЛОВЕСНЫЙ ПОРТРЕТ: Рост средний телосложение нормальное цвет волос шатенка  
 глаза голубые нос прямой лицо продолговатое

ОСОБЫЕ ПРИМЕТЫ: Абсолютно здоровая.

Подпись сотрудника, заполняющего опросный лист (обязательно указать должность)  
Секретарь областного управления НКВД В.И. Бирко

Отметки о перемещении интернированного: Убыл \_\_\_\_\_ 194 г. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Прибыл \_\_\_\_\_ 194 г. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Убыл \_\_\_\_\_ 194 г. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Прибыл \_\_\_\_\_ 194 г. \_\_\_\_\_



**Annex 6 – Personal file of Johann Weber Page 1** Registered file No. 820 of the detainee Veber, Iogan Karlovič, year of birth 1926; battalion 1021; Archive No. 135900; The file was closed by reason of repatriation on 10 November 1949; transfer to the repatriation camp no. 36;

Главное управление  
по делам о безопасности  
личных и интерпретационных

Архив № 135900

Учтенное дело № 820  
На интерпретационного  
Вебер Иоган Карлович  
1926

Дело закончено в связи с репатриацией  
в лагерь репатриации № 36  
10 ноября 1949 года

ЛЕННЫЕ И ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИОННЫЕ

Дата рождения в документах  
1926

Формы 3  
СРБ 1021

НАДЛЕЖ

**Annex 7** File from 22 March 1948 in which the head of the pit of Kujbyšev Coal UGOL' and the representative of the work battalion 1021, work inspector Rossadnikova, certify that Veber Ivan has acquired the qualification of a driller (БУРИЛЬЩИК).

22 марта 1948 года.

Мы, нижеподписавшиеся, квалификационная комиссия Начис  
13. Шахты тр. Куйбышевского т. Гусь  
и представителя СРБ 1021 Иван на работу Раввадников  
составили настоящий акт в том, что интерпретационный СРБ 1021  
Вебер Иван  
закреплен на рабочем месте  
привосен квалификацию Буровщик  
П/п. БОМАНТИР СРБ-1021  
НА ИСРБ / ВАНУЛЕНКО /

**Annex 8** Labor characterization from 6 November 1945 (ТРУДОВАЯ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА) of Veber, Iogan Karlovič, in which Major Vakulenko certifies that he has faithfully complied with the norm.

ТРУДОВАЯ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА

На интерпретационного Вебер Иоган Карлович

1926 г. род. Украинский Република  
в отточенной обл. интерпретационный с. Тоден  
на националистический Немец

Содержится в СРБ № 1021 6. 7. 48.

Работает буровиком. Шам 13 в интерпретационном  
к работе относится добросовестно, строго выполняет  
всех норм

Иван / ВАНУЛЕНКО /  
Вакulenko

Annex 9 – Personal file of Johann Weber Page 2 Questionnaire for the detainee  
(identical to Annex 1 – page 2)

ГЛАВНОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ НКВД СССР ПО ДЕЛАМ О ВОЕННОПЛЕННЫХ И ИНТЕРНИРОВАННЫХ

Учетное дело № 820 Батальон № 1021 Дата прибытия в батальон 6. (Декабрь) 1945 г.

Пол мужской

**ОПРОСНЫЙ ЛИСТ**  
на интернированного

Форма № 1

1	Фамилия	<u>Вебер</u>
2	Имя и отчество	<u>Иоган Карлович</u>
3	Год рождения	<u>1896</u>
4	Место рождения	<u>Рудынский районской обл. Троицко-Ильинский район с/п. Тодань Дом. 264</u>
5	Последнее место жительства интернированного	<u>Рудынский районской обл. Троицко-Ильинский район с/п. Тодань Дом. 264</u>
6	Точный адрес, состав семьи (фамилия, имя и отчество жены, детей или родителей, род занятий)	<u>Рудынский районской обл. Троицко-Ильинский район с/п. Тодань Дом. 264. Вебер Карл Карлович 1895 г.р. Мама Вебер Вильгельм Карлович 1908 г.р. крестьяне</u>
7	Соц. происхождение — сословие (имущественное положение родителей)	<u>из крестьян 15 гектар земли, помещ. Яковлев, отец 1000 с. А. Карлович с надельной постройкой</u>
8	Имущественное положение интернированного	<u>на надельной постройке</u>
9	Национальность	<u>русский</u>
10	Вероисповедание (религия)	<u>православный</u>
11	Партийность, если состоял, когда и где, сколько времени и причина выбытия	<u>не состоял</u>
12	Родной язык	<u>русский</u>
13	Перечислить какими языками владеет кроме родного	<u>румынский (говорит с матерью-румынкой)</u>
14	Подданство	<u>румынское</u>
15	Профессия и специальность (стаж работы) до интернирования	<u>не имеет</u>
16	Образование: а) Общее б) Специальное в) Военное	<u>7 классов народной школы в селе Тодань, не имеет</u>
17	Проживал ли в Советском Союзе (где, когда и чем именно занимался)	<u>не проживал</u>



Euxeinos 19-20 / 2015

**Annex 11** Certificate of the Romanian Ministry of Labor from 20 February 1973 which indicated that Elisabeth Klein carried out reconstruction work ("muncă de reconstrucție") between 19 January 1945 and 12 December 1946 according to a notice from the Ministry for Social Insurances of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic.

17

REPUBLICA SOCIALISTA ROMANIA  
 MINISTERUL MUNCII  
 OFICIUL DE EVIDENȚA DOCUMENTELOR  
 DE ASIGURARE  
 Piața Ipătescu 22  
 Sector 1-București

Nr. 23697/72 din 23/7 197

**ADEVERINȚĂ**

Pe baza datelor comunicate de Ministerul Asigurărilor Sociale al Republicii Socialiste Sovietice Ucrainiene


cu adresa nr. **V2-3354** din **30.I.1973**


se adeverește de noi că cetățean **a WEBER ELISABETA** ~~xxx~~ (fiica) lui **Carol** născut (ă) **x** **în anul 1925 în Hodon**

a participat la munca de reconstrucție în U.R.S.S., în perioada **19 ianuarie 1945-12 decembrie 1946** fiind folosit (ă) la diferite munci.

Nu a fost judecat (ă), nu a suferit accidente.

Prezenta adeverință s-a eliberat spre a-i servi la stabilirea vechimii în muncă.

DIRECTOR,  
  
 C. Ionescu

SERVICIU,  
  
 M. Poader

IA/CM  
 20.2.1973  
 1 ex.

## Annex 12 Notice of pension granted from the Agency for Social Insurances of Bistrița-Năsăud from 16 July 2014 for a deportee pension for Elisabeth Klein

### Agencia Județeană pentru Plăți și Inspectie Socială Bistrița-Năsăud

Comisia de aplicare a Decretului-Lege nr. 118/1990 privind acordarea unor drepturi persoanelor persecutate din motive politice de dictatura instaurată cu începere de la 6 martie 1945, precum și celor deportate în străinătate ori constituite în prizonieri

Decizia nr. 4/16.07.2014

Privind acordarea unor drepturi prevăzute de Decretul - Lege nr. 118/1990

Directorul Executiv al Agenției Județene pentru Plăți și Inspectie Socială Bistrița-Năsăud, d-na Bob Nastasia-Ani numită prin Decizia nr. 154/08.04.2013 a Directorului General al ANPIS:

Urmare cererii depuse prin poștă, înregistrată la Agenția Județeană pentru Plăți și Inspectie Socială Bistrița-Năsăud sub nr. 8673/03.07.2014, conform Legii nr. 211/2013, d-na Klein Elisabeth, cetățean german, cu domiciliul în Republica Federală Germania, Rheinauer Ring nr. 127/2, 76437 Rastatt, născută în com. Hodoni, raionul Timișoara la data de 25.04.1925, având ultimul domiciliu în România în localitatea Bistrița, B-dul Decebal, Bl. TS, Sc. A, ap. 15, Județul Bistrița-Năsăud, fiica lui Carol și Elisaveta, solicită stabilirea calității de beneficiar al D.L. 118/1990, în calitate de TITULAR AL DREPTURILOR, pentru perioada cât a fost deportată la muncă forțată în URSS.

Din probele administrate - documente: dovada că a fost deportată la muncă forțată în URSS - adeverința nr. 23697/72 din 23.02.1973 emisă de Ministerul Muncii-Oficiul de Evidența Documentelor de Asigurare al Republicii Socialiste România copie act de identitate, dovada că a avut cetățenie română/domiciliul în România, certificat de viață.

Văzând:

- Actele depuse la dosar de către petentă și încheierea de sedință a Comisiei pentru aplicarea D.L.118/1990, care a constat îndeplinirea de către petentă a condițiilor pentru acordarea drepturilor stabilite de D.L.118/1990;
- Memorandumul MMFPSPV, aprobat de Guvernul României la data de 04.12.2013;
- Dispozițiile art.9, alin.1 din Convenția Europeană a Drepturilor Omului, a Legii nr.211/2013 și art. 1, alin. 2, lit.a și art. 4 din D.L. 118/1990, privind îndeplinirea de către petent/a a condițiilor legale pentru a fi beneficiar al drepturilor stabilite de D.L. 118/1990, pentru perioada cât a fost deportată la muncă forțată în URSS.

Având în vedere: dispozițiile O.U.G. nr.113/2011 privind organizarea și funcționarea ANPIS și Regulamentul de Organizare și Funcționare al A. J.P.I.S/ a Municipiului București.

În temeiul competențelor conferite de actele normative în vigoare,

### DECIDE:

**ADMITE** cererea formulată de d-na Klein Elisabeth, cetățean german, cu domiciliul în Republica Federală Germania, Rheinauer Ring nr. 127/2, 76437 Rastatt, născută în com. Hodoni, raionul Timișoara la data de 25.04.1925, având ultimul domiciliu în România în localitatea Bistrița, B-dul Decebal, Bl. TS, Sc. A, ap. 15, Județul Bistrița-Năsăud, fiica lui Carol și Elisaveta, stabilește calitatea de beneficiar al D.L. 118/1990 în calitate de TITULAR AL DREPTURILOR, pentru perioada cât a fost deportată la muncă forțată în URSS.

**Stabilește că susnumita, în perioada 19.01.1945 până la 12 decembrie 1946 a fost deportată după 23 august 1944, se stabilește o perioadă de 1. an, 10 luni și 23 zile.**

Perioada de mai sus constituie vechime în muncă în condițiile art. 1, alin.3 din D.L. nr.118/1990, iar pentru fiecare an de deportare i se acordă o indemnizație lunară de 200 lei, conform art.4 alin. 1 din Decretul-Lege premenționat.

La calcularea stagiului de cotizare, Casa Teritorială de Pensii Publice Bistrița-Năsăud va aplica dispozițiile art.164, alin.3 și 4 din Legea nr.263/2010 privind pensiile publice.

Indemnizația lunară cuvenită, se calculează și se plătește de Casa Teritorială de Pensii Publice Bistrița-Năsăud, de la data de 01.08.2014.

Se dispune organelor competente să facă aplicarea art. 8 și 9 din D.L.118/1990 cu modificările ulterioare.

Cu drept de contestație în termen de 30 de zile de la comunicare la Tribunalul Bistrița-Năsăud, în condițiile Legii nr.554/2004 a contenciosului administrativ, cu modificările și completările ulterioare.

Prezenta s-a întocmit în 3 exemplare, din care un exemplar pentru A. J.P.I.S Bistrița-Năsăud, un exemplar pentru Casa Teritorială de Pensii Publice Bistrița-Năsăud și un exemplar pentru petentă.

PREȘEDINTE COMISIE,

*[Signature]*

Membri:

*[Signature]*



# Romanian Germans and the Memory of the Deportation to the Soviet Union

by Cristian Cercel, Sofia

## ABSTRACT

*This contribution discusses the memorialisation of the deportation of Romanian Germans to the Soviet Union, which took place in 1945, emphasising the links between the deportation and previous events and processes such as the appeal of Fascism for Romanian German communities and the mass enrolment of Romanian Germans in the SS.*

In January 1945, under Soviet pressure, between 70,000 and 80,000 Romanian citizens of German ethnicity were deported to the Soviet Union, for the 'reconstruction of the country': men between 17 and 45 years old, and women between 18 and 30 years old.<sup>1</sup> Most of the deportees ended up in the coal mines in the Donbas region, while about 10% were deported to the Urals and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Some of them were released in 1946 and 1947, yet these people were not sent back to Romania, but to Frankfurt/Oder, in the Soviet-occupation zone in Germany. In most cases they attempted either to go back from there to their home country, or to cross into what would subsequently become the Federal Republic of Germany. Subsequently, the great majority of the survivors were freed in 1949, and sent back to Romania. Around 15% of the deportees died during the deportation.<sup>3</sup> The temporary resettlement for forced labour took place after Romania's sudden change of sides during the Second World War, which occurred on 23 August 1944 and transformed Germans in Romania from a privileged group into the enemy within, a potential fifth column of Hitler's Germany. The fact that around

63,000 Romanian German men were fighting in SS and Wehrmacht units at the time was also particularly relevant in this context.<sup>4</sup> It also contributed to the gender imbalance amongst the deportees: around 40% were men, while about 60% were women.

Under state socialism, the deportation was to a large extent taboo in Romania. With the exception of a short period in the early 1950s, in which Romanian authorities attempted to present it as 'reconstruction' of the Soviet Union and the deportees as individuals who had the opportunity to contribute to building socialism, the forced labour experience of Romanian Germans was absent from official discourses.<sup>5</sup> Only community spaces such as the church provided to a certain extent opportunities for addressing the deportation and remembering its victims.<sup>6</sup> In part, the

4 For the enrolment of Romanian Germans in the SS, see Paul Milata, *Rumäniendeutsche in der Waffen-SS* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2007).

5 Annemarie Weber, *Rumäniendeutsche? Diskurse zur Gruppenidentität einer Minderheit 1945-1971* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), 108-123.

6 A detailed account of how the deportation was addressed in the church sphere is still to be written. Amongst the sources to be used for such an analysis, one should probably include the newsletters (*Heimatblätter*) published by Romanian Germans originating from the same locality after their migration to the Federal Republic. See for example the articles in *Zeidner Gruß* about the commemorative efforts (religious services, composition of a song dedicated to the deportees) taking place in the Lutheran Church in Codlea/Zeiden/Feketalom: *Aus Zeiden. Zeidner Gruß. Heimatbrief der Zeidner Nachbarschaft*, Pfingsten 1955, 5 and Hans Mieskes, "Danksagung an Lehrer Hans Mild,,, in *Zeidner Gruß. Heimatbrief der Zeidner Nachbarschaft*,

1 Mathias Beer, "Der Zweite Weltkrieg und die Nachkriegszeit", in *Siebenbürger und die Siebenbürger Sachsen*, by Konrad Gündisch with the collaboration of Mathias Beer (Munich: Langen Müller, 1998), 221.

2 Georg Weber et al., *Die Deportation von Siebenbürger Sachsen in die Sowjetunion 1945-1949. I: Die Deportation als historisches Geschehen* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1995), 404.

3 Beer, "Der Zweite Weltkrieg", 221.



privacy of the family space probably also enabled the transmission of discourses and narratives about the deportation.

One of the specificities of Romanian German history in the second half of the twentieth-century is connected with the process of mass migration of Germans from Romania to West Germany. In effect, this process started in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War: for example, for Romanian Germans who had fought in the SS, going back to Romania was out of the question. In this context, organisations of Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Swabians in West Germany such as the Homeland Associations (*Landsmannschaften*), or the Aid Committee (*Hilfskomitee*), founded in the early 1950s, attempted to take on the task of managing Romanian German identities and official memories.

With discourses underlining “German victimhood” prevalent in West Germany in the first post-war decades,<sup>7</sup> one could expect an emphasis on the memorialisation of the deportation from the Romanian German communities there. Nevertheless, such an emphasis came only later. In the 1950s and the 1960s, the need for a discursive and political integration into the broader ‘German expellee’ community led to highlighting the experiences of Saxons from Northern Transylvania, which bore more similarities to the expulsions of Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or Yugoslavia.<sup>8</sup>

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Am Georgentag 1957, 5-6.

7 Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

8 See also Cristian Cercel, “The Deportation of Romanian Germans to the Soviet Union and Its Place within Transylvanian Saxon Memory Discourses in Germany in the 1950s and the 1960s”, in *New Europe College Ștefan Odobleja Program Yearbook 2012-2013*, ed. Irina Vainovski-Mihai, 56-60.

Northern Transylvania had been under Hungarian control between 1940 and 1944 and the German population in the region was evacuated by the Wehrmacht in late August and early September 1944. Consequently, around 50,000 Northern Transylvanian Saxons fled to Austria and Southern Germany, most of them settling down there for good.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, letting aside some exceptional cases, a growing general interest in the deportation amongst the Romanian German communities in West Germany can be noticed starting in the second half of the 1970s and the 1980s. Nevertheless, further research should undoubtedly look in depth at the yet unestablished links between the particular Cold War context, anti-Communist discourses and the *Ostpolitik* in West Germany, and the memory discourses disseminated within Romanian German communities.

Interest in the deportation gained momentum after 1989, not only in the Federal Republic of Germany, but also in Romania. In the new political context in the latter country, former deportees founded an association to represent their interests. Also supported by the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania, they managed to be placed, from a legislative point of view, on equal footing with the former political prisoners under state socialism and hence enjoy the same rights as the latter. A profusion of memorialistic texts and oral history interviews followed: its seeds had been planted before 1989, yet such testimonies became more and more visible starting in the 1990s.<sup>10</sup>

9 Hans-Werner Schuster, “Grundzüge der Entwicklung der Landsmannschaft der Siebenbürger Sachsen in Deutschland”, in *60 Jahre Verband der Siebenbürger Sachsen in Deutschland. Grundzüge seiner Geschichte*, ed. Hans-Werner Schuster (Munich: Verband der Siebenbürger Sachsen in Deutschland e.V., 2009), 9.

10 Just some examples: Hermann Rehner,



The plight of the deportees has also been symbolically recognised by relevant political figures in both Romania and West Germany. The year 1995 is a milestone in this respect, as important manifestations took place in both countries, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the deportation. Braşov/Kronstadt/Brassó and Munich were the cities where the events took place. In the former case, Ion Iliescu, Romania's president at the time, and Nicolae Văcăroiu, the country's prime-minister, sent their official messages to the participants, thus acknowledging the suffering of Romanian Germans.<sup>11</sup> A large exhibition dedicated to the deportations of Germans from the entire Southeastern Europe was inaugurated in Munich. The city's deputy mayoress, Gertraud Burkert, and state secretary of the Bavarian government, Gerhard Merkl, attended the vernissage and held speeches on the occasion.<sup>12</sup>

*Wir waren Sklaven: Tagebuch eines nach Rußland Verschleppten* (Bucharest: Concordia, 1993); Liane Weniger, *Schatten am Don. Als Zwangsdeportierte aus Siebenbürgen in Kohlebergwerken in Russland, 1945-1946* (Dortmund: Forschungsstelle Osmittelleuropa, 1994); Helmut Berner, Doru Radosav (ed.), *und keiner weiß warum. Donbaß. Eine deportierte Geschichte* (Ravensburg: Landsmannschaft der Sathmarer Schwaben, 1996); Ernest Ulrich, *Din cartea vieţii mele: am fost deportat în U.R.S.S.* (Petroşani, Editura Fundaţiei Culturale "Ion D. Sîrbu", 2005; Lavinia Betea, Cristina Diac, Florin-Răzvan Mihai, Ilarion Țiu (ed.), *Lungul drum spre nicăieri. Germanii din România deportaţi în URSS* (Târgovişte: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2012).

11 "Mesajul domnului Ion Iliescu, Preşedintele României, adresat participanţilor la manifestările comemorative prilejuite de împlinirea a 50 de ani de la deportarea în URSS a unor grupuri de etnici germani din România - Braşov, 14 ianuarie 1995 -," Preşedintele României, [http://www.presidency.ro/pdf/date\\_arhiva/482\\_ro.pdf](http://www.presidency.ro/pdf/date_arhiva/482_ro.pdf) (accessed 6 October 2015); The text of Nicolae Văcăroiu's message, in German: "Eine schreckliche Vergeltung. Brief des Premiers Văcăroiu an die Teilnehmer der Veranstaltung," *Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung für Rumänien*, 21 January 1995.

12 See Hans-Werner Schuster, Walther Kon-

In addition, in the context of Romania's lobbying to join NATO and the European Union, the country's then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Adrian Severin, officially apologised in 1997 to his German counterpart, Klaus Kinkel, for the treatment of Romanian Germans during communist rule in Romania.<sup>13</sup> More precisely, he highlighted three "traumatic practices" directed against Romania's Germans between 1945 and 1989: the deportation to the Soviet Union, the deportation of Banat Swabians to Bărăgan (1951-1956) and the process through which the Romanian state "sold" its citizens of German ethnicity during the Cold War, i.e. allowed them to migrate only in exchange for cash payments or other financial advantages offered by the West German state.<sup>14</sup> Hence, Romanian Germans became in effect the first ethnic group that was granted exculpatory attention from high-ranked representatives of Romanian authorities. Jews and Roma, who had been victims of pre-1945 genocidal violence in Romania, had to wait longer in order for their suffering to be acknowledged. Moreover, this acknowledgment was highly contested.

Thus, after 1989, the deportation of Romanian Germans to the Soviet Union has turned into an official *lieu de mémoire*, acknowledged as such both within and outside the community.

schitzky (ed.), *Deportation der Südostdeutschen in die Sowjetunion* (Munich: Haus des Deutschen Ostens, 1999).

13 "Guvernul Ciorbea dezavuează total deportarea şi vânzarea etnicilor germani din România în perioada comunismului. Declaraţia d-lui ministru Adrian Severin", *România liberă*, 3 May 1997, 3; Andreea Bratosin, "Ministrul român de externe cere scuze pentru abuzurile din trecut împotriva etnicilor germani", *Adevărul*, 3-4 May 1997, 7.

14 Florica Dobre, Florian Banu, Luminiţa Banu, Laura Stancu (ed.), *Acţiunea "Recuperarea". Securitatea şi emigrarea germanilor din România (1962-1989)* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2011).

Its relevance within the identity discourses and practices of Transylvanian Saxons, Banat Swabians or Satu Mare Swabians is highlighted by the commemorative events taking place each January in both Romania and Germany, by the numerous articles appearing in Romanian German (or even in Romanian) publications every year in the same period of time, and by the many commemorative plaques in localities in Transylvania and Banat referring to those who perished during the deportation (often placed alongside those who died in the Second World War). Moreover, in 1995 a monument dedicated to the deportees was erected in Reșița/Reschitz/Resicabánya in western Romania. The international success of Nobel Prize laureate Herta Müller's most recent (2009) novel, *Atemschaudel* (translated into English as *The Hunger Angel*), dealing with the deportation, also stands as evidence of the constantly growing mnemonic interest in the phenomenon. It also suggests that the deportation is being inscribed into the global landscape of memory and is gaining relevance beyond the Romanian German context.

Linked with particular pre-1989 discourses, a narrative of Romanian German victimhood has emerged in both Romania and the Federal Republic of Germany following the fall of the Ceaușescu regime. The deportation to the Soviet Union and the migration to West Germany, sometimes coined as "human trafficking", occupy a central place in this narrative. Yet this rather simplified narrative eschews what happened before the deportation of January 1945. This omission plays a highly important role in the construction of Germans as the paradigmatic victims in Romania's recent history. In addition, variants of this narrative, which do not neglect the pre-1945 background, somehow manage to link the prehistory of

the deportation, e.g. the mass enrolment of Romanian Germans in the SS in April 1943, with the deportation as such by means of the same victimhood glue. According to such narratives, Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Swabians were putatively not only victims of the Soviet-backed communist takeover of Romania, but also of National-Socialism.<sup>15</sup>

April 1943 and January 1945 should be indeed linked as part of one and the same narrative. Yet this is not the story of pure Romanian German victimhood, but rather a story emphasising the interweavings between the rather uncritical embrace of National-Socialism within Romanian German communities, the enrolment in the SS, and the deportation to the Soviet Union for the 'reconstruction of the country'. In effect, the deportees were victims (the gender imbalance amongst the deportees is also telling in this respect) who were forced to pay for the guilt of those who actively took part in a war of extermination and annihilation unleashed by Nazi Germany. Yet remembering and speaking only about the former and their suffering or equating the former with the latter is simply a way to avoid addressing sensitive and thorny issues in the twentieth-century history of Romanian Germans.

This history is also one of privilege. As a consequence of the First World War, the Romanian state incorporated regions with sizable German-speaking groups, which

15 See for example the letter by Paul Philipp (at the time President of the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania) addressed to then German President Roman Herzog (1996), in which the former pleads for an official acknowledgment of the status of Romanian Germans as "victims of National-Socialism": Paul Philipp, "Verstrickung, Schuld und Opfer", in *Kirche und Politik. Siebenbürgische Anamnesen und Diagnosen aus fünf Jahrzehnten. Teil II: Zwischen 1992 und 2005* (Sibiu: hora Verlag, 2006), 150-151.

formerly belonged to the Habsburg Empire (Transylvania, Banat, Bukovina) or to the Russian Empire (Bessarabia). Thus, according to the results of the census conducted in Romania, there were 745,421 ethnic Germans in the country in 1930.<sup>16</sup> Against the background of assimilationist pressures coming from Romanian authorities and the international economic crisis, a process of radicalisation took place, which was also linked with Hitler's coming to power in Germany and with the attractive message of Nazism for Germans abroad. Nevertheless, at least amongst Transylvanian Saxons, Fascism was not simply an ideological import, but had significant indigenous tenets, as the case of Fritz Fabritius' Self-Help (*Selbsthilfe*) movement founded as early as 1922 shows.<sup>17</sup> The process of right-wing radicalisation within Romanian German communities became particularly visible, i.e. entered the mainstream of Romanian German political life in the 1930s, also with support from Berlin. The programmatic statement (*Volksprogramm*) issued following the political assembly of Transylvanian Saxons (*Sachsensitag*) from October 1933 spoke of "*Lebensraum*", "willingness to sacrifice for the entirety of the Volk" (*Opferbereitschaft für das Volksganze*), or racial hygiene (*Rassenhygiene*).<sup>18</sup> In Banat,

the National-Socialists received almost 20% of the votes in the elections for the Banat Swabian Council (*Volksrat*), which took place in April 1933.<sup>19</sup> Internecine conflicts within the Romanian German extreme right-wing camp and some opposition from Romanian authorities hindered to a certain extent the swift coagulation of a unitary movement. Opposition to National-Socialism came mainly from conservative groups centered around the Catholic Church in Banat and the Lutheran Church in Transylvania, but lacked assertiveness. Some pockets of left-wing opposition (and subsequently resistance) could be found mainly within the working-class milieu in Banat.<sup>20</sup>

Against the background of the right-wing radicalisation taking place in Romania as a whole, of the Romanian-German rapprochement, and under pressure from Berlin, Romanian German developments were forcibly coordinated with events in Nazi Germany in the late 1930s, the so-called *Gleichschaltung*. In November 1940, Germans in Romania, represented now by the Berlin-backed German Ethnic Group (*Deutsche Volksgruppe*), were granted a high degree of autonomy by the dictatorial regime of Ion Antonescu, who would subsequently (1941) thrust Romania into an alliance with Nazi Germany.<sup>21</sup> It was in effect the very first case of autonomy granted on ethnic grounds in the history of the Romanian state. This autonomy lasted until 23 August 1944, when Romania changed sides in the war. At the same time, also in 1940, Germans from Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Dobruja were relocated to the

16 Sabin Manuilă, *Recensământul general al populației României din 29 decembrie 1930*. Volumul II: *Neam, limbă maternă, religie* (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Central de Statistică, 1938), XXIV.

17 Tudor Georgescu, "Pursuing the Fascist Promise: The Transylvanian Saxon 'Self-Help' from Genesis to Empowerment, 1922-1935", in *Re-Contextualising East Central European History*, ed. Robert Pyrah, Marius Turda (London: LEGENDA, 2010), 55-73.

18 Harald Roth, *Politische Strukturen und Strömungen bei den Siebenbürger Sachsen 1918-1933* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 234-240); Gündisch, *Siebenbürgen und die Siebenbürger Sachsen*, 190-196;

Georgescu, "Pursuing the Fascist Promise", 63-65.

19 Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868-1948. Ihre Rolle im rumänischen und serbischen Banat* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014), 115.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*, 192.

newly expanding German Reich as part of the 'Heim ins Reich' program.<sup>22</sup>

One of the strange effects of the Romanian-German war alliance was the mass enrolment of Romanian Germans in the infamous Waffen-SS.<sup>23</sup> The drafting, which was sanctioned by an interstate Romanian-German agreement, took place in April 1943. The text of the agreement stated that the Romanian German volunteers would join units of the "Wehrmacht-SS", translated into Romanian as "armata germană SS" (The German army SS).<sup>24</sup> There may have been pragmatic reasons for confusing conflation of the two terms, such as allowing the possibility for the conscripts to join either of the two organizations. At the same time, the wording actually also mirrored the fact that for some recruits there was no proper difference between the German army and the SS: they were simply going "to the Germans".<sup>25</sup>

The voluntary character of this enrolment can be taken with a pinch of salt. Yet the acceptance of the National-Socialist ideology amongst Romanian Germans, tightly linked with an uncritical embrace of anything related to Germany, greatly facilitated the recruitment. The deportation to the Soviet Union, tragic as it is, stands in direct relationship with these previous events and, on a more general level, with the genocidal policies and with the population transfers carried out by the Nazis and their allies from September 1939 onwards.<sup>26</sup> Considering the dire economic situation of the Soviet Union as a consequence

of the Nazi aggression, the deportation was simultaneously also clearly motivated by Soviet workforce requirements in the Donbas region and thus was intended to resuscitate an industry destroyed by the war. The official wording 'reconstruction of the country' in effect referred to the Soviet post-war realities. Public memory discourses and memorialisation attempts related to Romanian Germans should attempt to address and account for the complex interconnections sketched above and thus move away from the attractive, yet oversimplifying, victimhood narrative. Narrating victimhood without narrating previous perpetrations is, in this particular case, a rather incomplete and very much biased way of dealing with the past.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cristian Cercel, born in 1984, BA in European Studies (University of Bucharest), MA in Nationalism Studies (Central European University), PhD in Politics (Durham University). He has held various postdoctoral fellowships, among others with New Europe College (Bucharest), the Centre for Contemporary German Culture (Swansea University), and the Centre for Advanced Study (Sofia). He has published extensively in the Romanian cultural weekly *Observator cultural*. He is also the author of peer-reviewed articles published in *Nationalities Papers* and *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*. e-mail: accercel[at]gmail.com

22 Dirk Jachomowski, *Die Umsiedlung der Bessarabien-, Bukowina- und Dobrukschadeutschen: von der "Volksgruppe" in Rumänien zur „Siedlungsgruppe“ an der Reichsgrenze* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1984).

23 Milata, *Rumäniendeutsche in der Waffen-SS*.

24 *Ibid.*, 151-152.

25 *Ibid.*, 173.

26 Weber et al., *Die Deportation*.

## Literary Experiments under a Dictatorship – The Banat Action Group in Timișoara

by Markus Bauer, Berlin

In contrast to the “Transylvanian Saxons” who already started settling in the Carpathian Arc in the Middle Ages, the “Banat Swabians” only arrived in the Habsburg borderland on the rivers Tisza and Bega in the 18th century. The emigrants from Lorraine, Alsace, Odenwald, and Bohemia followed the publicity campaigns of the Austrian administration. After generations of hard work, “German” streets of houses, districts, and even entire villages and cities also arose in the marshy region alongside those of other nationalities. From a literary perspective, the Swabians already emerged during the Habsburg Empire, as the multilingual city of Timișoara gave rise to theaters, newspapers, schools and books – as well as a special group of young authors. They experimented with a unique form of literary cooperation around 1970 while this was possible for a short time in communist Romania.

After the end of the Second World War and the takeover of the communist regime, the Banat Swabian minority suffered from deportations to the Soviet Union and the Bărăgan steppe along the lower Danube, as well as expropriations and bans on school lessons in their own language. When the conditions again improved for the cultural activities of the minority in the 1960s, German-language newspapers were published and German-language instruction was offered in schools.

During the years after the transfer of power from Gheorghe Gheorghe-Dej to Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965), the young aspiring poets found support in the publishing world of the German minority with their official magazines, newspapers and publishing houses due to an unforeseeable coincidence. When Ceaușescu decided to not participate in the violent suppression of the Prague Spring and established diplomatic relations with

Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany, the party official Nikolaus Berwanger took over the German-language newspaper “*Die Wahrheit*” in Timișoara, which he soon renamed “*Neue Banater Zeitung*” and completely changed its format. From the layout to the content, the newspaper was refreshed and oriented more towards the everyday life of the German minority, which was very interested in culture and literature. These changes were particularly aimed at attracting young readers including pupils and students. Special sections for schools and universities were regularly printed, which gave the young people an opportunity to be creative themselves. These pages were filled with poems and prose as well as reports from schools.

Particularly noteworthy was the upper secondary school (*Gymnasium*) in Großsanktnikolaus, where several pupils in the class of the German teacher Dorothea Götze were interested in literature. Richard Wagner (born 1952), Werner Kremm (born 1951), Johann Lippert (born 1951), Anton Sterbling (born 1953) dealt with lyricism, wrote their own texts and discussed them. “The first contacts date back to the upper secondary school (*Gymnasium*), when I was in eleventh and twelfth grade. [...] We already shared our poems and spoke about them back then. This was so-to-speak a preliminary form of the Action Group”, as Richard Wagner later remembered.<sup>1</sup> Young authors such as Gerhard Ortinau (born 1953), Ernest Wichner (born 1952), and somewhat later Herta Müller (born 1953) also wrote in Timișoara at the *Lenau Gymnasium* (upper secondary school) and their texts were printed in the special school

1 Renatus Deckert: „Das ist eine untergegangene Welt“. Gespräch mit Richard Wagner. In: Sinn und Form (2011), p. 804.



section of the *Neue Banater Zeitung*. The work of an additional author, who attracted attention with his elegant poems - Albert Bohn (born 1955) -, could be found on the pages dedicated to the *Neuarad Gymnasium*. An author from Reșița named Rolf Bossert (1952-1986), whose witty lyricism particularly stood out, joined the group later. Due to the geographical distance from Bucharest and because he later worked as a teacher in a small village, he remained more of a "corresponding", yet still fully-fledged member of the Timișoara group. The closer association between the students, who in part were already friends with one another, resulted from their studies together at the West University of Timișoara. Due to differences in age, their life situations were diverse. Some already had taken up university studies, while others were still preparing for their university-entrance examination (*Abitur*) at one of the upper secondary schools in Banat or were already working as teachers. By 1972 though, most of them had moved on from the special school section to the student insert of the *Neue Banater Zeitung* known as "*Universitas*". This enabled them to present their literary products to a larger university and academic readership.

The origins of the Action Group can be traced back to a conversation, which the editor of the "*Neue Banater Zeitung*", Eduard Schneider, held with several members of the group in early April 1972 in Timișoara and printed in the newspaper with the apt title "*Am Anfang war das Wort*" (In the beginning was the word).<sup>2</sup> Here the participants expressed what

2 Am Anfang war das Wort. Erstmalige Diskussion junger Autoren. Standpunkte und Standorte, in: *Neue Banater Zeitung*, 2 April 1972, Excerpts in: *Ein Pronomen ist verhaftet worden. Texte der Aktionsgruppe Banat*. Edited by Ernest Wichner. Frankfurt a. M. 1992, pp. 31-35.

their literature had in common as well as their convictions and perceptions. The precise ideas with which the students approached their writings are surprising. At the very beginning, Anton Sterbling gave priority to reality and the perception of it in the poetology of the young authors: "We are writing based on a new awareness of reality. We have a dual relationship to reality - to a spiritual and to a concrete material reality. Linguistically and educationally in part belonging to German literature, what is written must deal with the reality here."<sup>3</sup> The political thrust which the members of the Action Group dared to pursue in their writings amid the communist reality behind the Iron Curtain becomes apparent here.

Indeed, the poems, prose, and group texts produced in the following years up to the dismantling by the Securitate in 1975 display a political undertone, which was more than unusual in this environment. Regarding the themes of their poems, they noticeably reveal how well the authors were informed about European and even global developments. In astonishing unison with the students' movement against the Vietnam War and the lacking efforts to systematically deal with the national-socialist past in Germany, they wrote poems such as "*Mit Chile im Herzen*" (William Totok, born 1951), "*Kommentar zu einem Bericht über Chile*" (Albert Bohn), "*auch. eine ars poetica*" (Johann Lippert) against totalitarianism or prose such as "*Party auf dem Lande*" (Gerhard Ortinau) against the involvement of their parents' generation in the Second World War. The productions of the young authors are critical of society, theory-based and reflective of their own writings. Also astonishing is the wide range of reading, which comprised

3 *ibid.*, p. 31.



Gerhard Ortinau. 2010.  
Source: Amrei-Marie, wikipedia

Critical Theory authors such as Adorno, Marcuse and Benjamin as well as modern literature since Brecht and contemporary Western and Eastern German literature.<sup>4</sup> The poets gained access to books and magazines in many different ways, in order to understand international discourses from within the Banat region of communist Romania.

An additional impetus for their literary productions was the desire to distinguish themselves from their parents' generation. Similarly to many people in Western Germany, these critical youths regarded their fathers' participation in the Waffen SS during the Second World War and the unbroken glorification of this period at Swabian festivals as a reason for a polemic and profound alienation from the parents' generation. The Banat Action Group distanced itself from the traditions of the German minority in the villages, from speaking the dialect, and from the arrogance towards other ethnic groups. As Richard Wagner later stated: "These men and

4 See Markus Bauer: Kritische Theorie in Temeswar – Zum Epochenhintergrund der „Aktionsgruppe Banat“, in: *Études Germaniques* 67 (2012), no. 3, pp. 463-474.

women wanted to put us in their traditional costumes and make us dance to their music with brass instruments. But we listened to [...] the Rolling Stones, Street fighting man and I can't get no satisfaction. We let our hair grow and the men and women wanted to cut it off, just like the village policeman. The village communities had a provincial intolerance, which we wanted to get away from."<sup>5</sup>

The authors defined themselves as a leftist group. In the communist Romania of the 1970s this initially meant that the young authors occupied a free space, which seemed natural for them. In the environment familiar to them they wanted to produce literature which appeared appropriate to them in terms of their convictions and demands, which simultaneously had a social function. Thus, the concept of

"engagement" played a role: "For me engagement means the opposite of the 'rocking chair mentality', the dozing satisfaction with traditional concepts. Its big chance is the experiment which remains meaningful when



Ernest Wichner  
Book Fair Leipzig, 2015.  
Source: Amrei-Marie, wikipedia

it is current and realistic. Our problems are local; they are the problems of our reality in which the Romanian-German literary scene also has its function."<sup>6</sup> This is how Albert

5 Richard Wagner: Die Aktionsgruppe Banat. Versuch einer Selbstdarstellung, in: *ibid.*, p. 225.

6 Engagement als Chance und Veränderung. Rundtischgespräch mit jungen Autoren in Temeswar, in: *Karpatenrundschau* 22

Bohn substantiated the poetological function of the politically charged concept in another roundtable discussion.

In the decreasingly liberal climate under the regime, this stance necessarily led to problems, which also heralded the end of the Action Group. Although individual members still were able to publish books, the group had long become a target of the Securitate. In 1975 the secret police arrested several members near the border based on the accusation that they wanted to leave the country illegally. William Totok<sup>7</sup> spent a half-year in pre-trial detention. During the same year Ernest Wichner and Anton Sterbling already left for West Germany. Although there were still attempts to further pursue the concept of the Banat Action Group with an official authors' association, its history ended in the increasingly rigid regime. All members of the association except for Werner Kremm left Romania in the 1980s and moved on with their different lives in the Federal Republic of Germany. When Herta Müller, who was closely associated with the Action Group, received the Nobel Prize in 2009, she commemorated her friends from Timișoara: "Luckily I met friends, a handful of young poets, in the city. Without them I would not have read and written books."

*Translated by Michael Dobbins*

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June 1973, cit. in *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> William Totok is the author of the paper „Reception of the Final Report of the International Commission for Investigation of the Romanian Holocaust (‘Wiesel Commission’)“, published in the very first issue of *Euxeinos*: *Euxeinos* 1/2011 Holocaust in Romania, edited by Daniel Ursprung. (remark of *Euxeinos*’ editorial team)

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Markus Bauer is a freelance writer based in Berlin. His main themes of research are Romanian culture and history, exile literature and early modern culture. He studied German literature and history at the Universities of Passau and Marburg. He completed his PhD thesis, which dealt with melancholy in the writings of Walter Benjamin, at the University of Marburg in 2005. From 1989 to 1992 he was a member of the Graduate School *Kunst im Kontext* at the University of Marburg. After obtaining a DAAD grant he was a lecturer at the Universitatea "Ioan Alexandru Cuza" in Iași (Romania) from 1998 to 2003. From 2005 to 2007 he collaborated on a project on the Yiddish press in Czernowitz at Portsmouth University (UK).

His publications include several (co)edited books on "*Mitteleuropa*", the idea of frontiers, the work of Erich Auerbach, and single authored books on Marburg as well as on Walter Benjamin. His book on Romanian cultural history entitled *In Rumänien. Auf den Spuren einer europäischen Verwandtschaft* was published in 2009 in Berlin (Transit Verlag). Several of his book chapters deal with German literature in Romania, Jewish city culture, and the *Aktionsgruppe Banat*.

He is a frequent collaborator with the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* regarding Romanian cultural issues.

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# The Romanian Germans and the Securitate Heritage. An Outline of the Problem and Research Potential

by Florian Kühner-Wielach, Munich

## Abstract

*This article deals with the efforts to assess the Securitate files, while focusing on Romanian German writers. I address, on the one hand, the explanatory power of this type of source and, on the other hand, the effects which the opening of secret service archives has had on a specific group, in this case the Romanian Germans. On the basis of an analysis of the media discourse regarding the unofficial involvement of Romanian-German actors in the Securitate that is centered around concepts of "guilt", "justice" and "legality", I will outline the most important problems in the process of coming to terms with the Securitate heritage: the uncertain explanatory power and the hardly manageable amount of sources, the (delayed) need to come to terms with both the national-socialist and communist past as well as the deep involvement of affected persons in the process itself. As a potential way out of these dilemmas, I will apply a professionalized instrument of analysis to this problematic type of source, which involves a stronger focus on comparable cases and issues which overcome the ethnocentric perspective.*

Their names were "Moga", "Stein Otto", "Cristina" or "Sorin". Behind these aliases were well-known personalities from the Romanian-German community – authors, intellectuals, teachers and journalists. After the archive of the previous Romanian secret service Securitate was opened, it was possible to learn more about their secret lives hidden behind these aliases. They were unofficial employees (*Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter, IM*), on the one hand, or observed and betrayed persons on the other hand – and frequently enough both in one: simultaneously victims of and collaborators with the regime; blackmailers and blackmail victims, opportunists or men of conviction. Many of them had already been suspected of cooperating with the Romanian secret service before the archives were opened. Nevertheless, friendships and mentor relationships, many of which had lasted for many decades, fell apart after the files were read.

This painful process of coming to terms with the Romanian-German history only just began a few years ago, approximately two decades after the collapse of the Eastern Block: The strong emigration of Romanian citizens of German ethnicity to the Federal Republic of Germany, which lasted from the 1970s to the early 1990s, not only brought easily employable

workers to Germany, but all the problems these people were burdened with under the authoritarian system as well. As long as the secret service archives remain closed, the dark spots in many biographies only existed at the level of assumptions and suspicions. When it emerged in 2010 as a result of the opening of archives that the lyricist and Georg-Büchner prize-holder from Transylvania, Oskar Pastior, was active as an informer for the Securitate in the 1960s, this set of problems reached a broader public in the Federal Republic of Germany for the first time. It became clear that it was neither a purely "Romanian" problem, nor was it merely a memory of a dark past: the gloomy Romanian-German history spans to the present and also became a German issue, at the latest when German jurisprudence began to play a role.

## THE SECURITATE AND THE ROMANIAN GERMANS

Due to the collapse of the Danube Monarchy and the transition of previously Tsarist Russia into the Soviet Empire after the First World War, several regions with groups of German settlers were separated <sup>1</sup> and attributed to the

<sup>1</sup> The Bukovina from the Austrian part, the Banat and Transylvania from the Hungarian part of the dual monarchy as well as Bessarabia from Russia.



emerging “Greater Romania”. Only gradually did these denominationally, culturally and spatially entirely disparate groups identify with the concept of “Romanian Germanness” and they only became closer to one another as a result of the racist and nationalist promises of National-Socialism and later due to the repressions of the communist regime.

After the upheavals of the Second World War this was limited almost entirely to the Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Swabians. Around 350,000 of the approx. 750,000 counted Germans (1930) with Romanian citizenship had remained in the country, while the remaining Germans resettled or were evacuated during the war or were deported to the Soviet Union for forced labor after the war. Nevertheless, Romania remained a country with many ethnic minorities, in particular Hungarians, various Slavic groups, Germans and Jews.

The Romanian secret service Securitate was founded in 1948 under Soviet leadership. According to the official foundation decree, it was supposed to guarantee the security of the Romanian People’s Republic and defend it against all domestic and foreign enemies.<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of the newly established communist regime, the Germans living in Romania after the Second World War were, so to speak, both at the same time: as Romanian citizens they were potential *domestic* enemies. In contrast to other countries with German minorities, in which expulsions and murders occurred after 1945, the Romanian government generally strived for the (re)integration of “its” Germans. Nevertheless, the Romanian Germans were viewed as a collective group,

which avowed itself to the “mother country” Germany and became deeply mired in the national-socialist ideology and activities, and as national “*externals*”. In the best case, they were seen as a “cohabitating nationality”, in the worst case as “foreigners” despite their Romanian citizenship, whose ethnonational affiliation with “Germanness” always raised doubts about their loyalty to the state.

During the Stalinist period, this generalized skepticism was reflected in the construction of conspiracy theories among the ethnic minorities, in particular the Hungarian minority. Against this background, several group trials occurred against relatively randomly constructed groups within the German minority. However, these intimidation and disciplinary measures were not only restricted to minority groups, as Romanian “class enemies” were also antagonized. Two widely known cases affecting the German minority that have been partially openly dealt with are the so-called “Black Church Trial” (1958), which targeted a group of Transylvanian Saxons suspected of ideological deviation, and the Braşov authors trial (*Kronstädter Schriftstellerprozess*) (1959), in which five Romanian-German authors were indicted.

At the latest after Nicolae Ceauşescu came to power in 1965, the Securitate changed its strategy and transformed itself from a more or less openly applied terror instrument of the Communist Party to a subtly acting organization, which infiltrated the society through concealed, targeted actions against individual persons and groups. A well-developed system of informers not only provided for information, but also for a permanent feeling of mistrust and insecurity. This fed the desire of many Romanian citizens

<sup>2</sup> Helmut Müller-Enbergs: Bilder einer Ausstellung. In: Katharina Kilzer, Helmut Müller-Enbergs (eds.): Geist hinter Gittern. Die rumänische Gedenkstätte *Sighet Memorial*. Berlin 2013, p. 76.

to emigrate, not only those of Romanian-German origin. Those who did not practice self-censorship and anticipatory obedience were made compliant through blackmail as well as preferential treatment and enticements of a material nature. This was the Romania that the Romanian Germans left in the 1960s and in particular in the 1970s on the basis of bilaterally arranged quotas negotiated by price.<sup>3</sup> They had the “poison” of the Securitate in their baggage, because many of them were committed informants, while some even remained in the service of the Securitate after their departure.

#### COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST: THE EXAMPLE OF PASTIOR

After the 1989 revolution, the Securitate archives initially remained closed. The delayed process of dealing with the past is closely related to the fact that the collapse of the communist regime and the quick execution of the married dictator couple, the Ceaușescus, in December 1989 did not lead to a true democratization of the society. Instead officials loyal to the system (even if hostile to the Ceaușescus) from the second and third tiers came to power. This pertains above all to the party official Ion Iliescu, who had been disgraced and “hibernated” as a publishing house director in Bucharest from 1984 to the transformation phase, before soaring back in late 1989 as a “revolution winner” to become the President of Romania. He held this office, which left him considerable leeway to influence political developments, from 1989 to 1996 and from 2000 to 2004. During his final term in office, he prevented the effective opening of the Securitate archives, even though a corresponding law had

already been adopted in 1999. A year later the CNSAS (*Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității*, Eng. National Council for Studying the Archives of the Securitate) was created. Similarly to the Office of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records of the former German Democratic Republic (BStU), this state institution has the task of organizing archives and scientifically accompanying the process of coming to terms with the Securitate heritage. Personally affected persons were accordingly only allowed to view their own file after 2005, if it could be found. Approbated researchers can read all files, if they have been released. As a rule, mentions of persons are blackened out by employees of the CNSAS before the files are released. (However, it is still not hard for insiders to align these black spots with concrete persons based on the context.)

The *Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk* (SOKW-Southeast German Cultural Society), an institution based in Munich and founded in 1951 to research and communicate the history and culture of the Germans originating from the Danube-Carpathian region, seized the initiative in the early 1990s and published the first analysis of the persecution of Romanian Germans by the communist regime entitled “*Worte als Gefahr und Gefährdung: Fünf Schriftsteller vor Gericht. Kronstadt 1959*” (Words as a danger and endangerment: five writers in court. Brașov 1959).<sup>4</sup> “Self-testimonies” – reports from contemporary witnesses as well as literary analyses of the events in 1959 and their consequences were juxtaposed with analyses of the trial records, if they were available. The authors deliberately demonstrated how difficult it is to build on

<sup>3</sup> See Hannelore Baier: *Kauf von Freiheit*. Sibiu 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Motzan, Stefan Sienerth (eds.): *Worte als Gefahr und Gefährdung. Fünf deutsche Schriftsteller vor Gericht*. München 1993.

reports from contemporary witnesses and documents, which originated under extreme ideological and institutional pressure:

The author of the article on the author's trial was able to draw on the trial records when clarifying several issues. However, is it not imperative to be doubly cautious with this matter? Based on the Communist-Stalinist practices of legal terror, events that belong to the past are twisted, custom-tailored and simplified; a course of events suitable to the prosecutor is dictated a posteriori on "reality", from which the "guilt" of the defendant is determined a priori. Testimonies can be extorted, elicited, misappropriated and turned into the opposite. The giving of evidence is a mockery of any legal foundations. And they do not shy away from any efforts to embed the image of certain persons or groups in the records, which is desired by the rulers and passed onto their "world thereafter" as such. The contradictions, falsifications and distortions are truly eye-catching when comparing the accessible trial records. They speak a gloomily eloquent language of a repressive-aggressive 'line of argument' and provide insights into the mechanisms of the inhuman, totalitarian exercise of power.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these and subsequent initiatives, the Romanian-German side only began to address the fate of the Romanian Germans in communist Romania – which according to the author of the volume from 1993 the "West German media remained scandalously silent about"<sup>6</sup> at a later point in time. In 2009, the Romanian-German lyricist and director of the Hessian Literature Forum based in Frankfurt/Main, Werner Söllner, publically admitted that he was an unofficial employee of the Securitate

"against his will"<sup>7</sup> in 2009 at a conference of the IKGS, the SOKW's successor institution, in Munich<sup>8</sup>.

However, if we look back at the first decades of dealing with the past, it is apparent that the warning given already in 1993 to trust neither the transmitted records, nor the newspapers did not entirely reach the actors involved in the process. The precept of caution remained a commitment, even though it was not overly evidently reflected in the research design – if one existed. This is particularly evident with the example of Oskar Pastior, whose activity as an unofficial employee became public in 2010: In the 3/2009 edition of the cultural and scientific journal "*Spiegelungen*" an article about Pastior's Securitate file written by then director of the IKGS, the literary scholar Stefan Sienerth, was published. Essentially he gives a commented account of the content of Pastior's personal file with the Securitate.

Pastior, who died in 2006, was posthumously awarded the Georg-Büchner Prize several weeks after his death. This shifted even greater attention to Romanian-German literary works, which were already known due to him and author colleagues such as Richard Wagner or Herta Müller, but were not yet widely acknowledged. Even though most of the literature was already written in Germany, this nearly comet-like ascent of a "German in exile" by origin was affirmed by the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Herta Müller from Banat in 2008, to whose book *The Hunger Angel* ("*Atemschaukel*") Pastior had strongly contributed until his

<sup>5</sup> Motzan: *Gefahr*, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> <<http://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2009-12/werner-soellner-securitate>>, 10 October 2015.

<sup>8</sup> See Gerhardt Csejka, Stefan Sienerth: *Vexierspiegel Securitate. Rumäniendeutsche Autoren im Visier des kommunistischen Geheimdienstes*. Regensburg 2014.

death. The discovered records of Pastior's written declaration of collaboration with the Securitate was thus a small sensation: at this moment, the fatherly mentor of the resistant Herta Müller apparently turned out to be a collaborator of the communist regime.

The carefully interpreted passages of this study, which can be regarded as a key document in the relevant discourse, show how difficult it is to provide information on the intentions, extent and effect of informer activities on the basis of the Securitate files. Along these lines, Sienerth warns, on the one hand, about too quickly condemning the lyricist, who operated in the files as "Stein Otto":

The information that 'Otto Stein' may have delivered to the Romanian communist secret service between June 1961 and April 1968, when he made the decision not to return to Romania after a visit to Austria and settled permanently in the Federal Republic of Germany, cannot be determined now. There is extremely little information in his file.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, he discusses what *cannot* be found in the file: "During all these years no single effort by Pastior to reject collaboration with the Romanian secret service or to do anything to free himself from this mental burden can be observed."<sup>10</sup>

Nearly simultaneously while already reacting to Sienerth's study, Ernest Wichner – an author, translator, director of Berlin Literature House (*Literaturhaus Berlin*), and Pastior's "long-time friend and excellent connoisseur of his work"<sup>11</sup> – published an article in the

*Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung*, which was also dedicated to Pastior's file. All in all, Wichner comes to the same conclusion as Sienerth: there is only one single report in Pastior's file with "denunciatory" content.<sup>12</sup> On the same day, 18 September 2010, the first reactions of the Literature Noble Prize Laureate Herta Müller were published. After initially being "startled and angry as well"<sup>13</sup>, she came to the defense of her friend: "I do not have to distance myself from Oskar. I am just as fond of him as I was beforehand."<sup>14</sup> The writer Dieter Schlesak, who saw himself as the "last witness of the Bucharest era (1961 to 1968) when Herta Müller and Ernest Wichner were still children", did the same a few days later. In view of the "exceptional circumstances" at that time, he showed understanding for the fact that Pastior succumbed to the invasive Securitate: "a terrible state of fear on a daily basis, sleeplessness, trembling during telephone calls, waiting for the 'commanding officer', looking around in the 'pub'." Schlesak was certain: "This late reemergence of the devil Securitate cannot damage my friendly feelings towards Oskar Pastior after his death now!"<sup>15</sup>

"Cases" such as the one outlined here certainly did not come out of the blue from the academic, literary and media sphere, but rather were anticipated on the basis of indications, assumptions and insider knowledge originating from Romania. An article about the lyricist Georg Hoprich already

9 Stefan Sienerth: Ich habe Angst vor unerfundenen Geschichten. In: *Spiegelungen* 5 (2010), Vol. 3, p. 253.

10 Ibidem, p. 255.

11 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/oskar-pastior-und-die-securitate-die-spaete-entdeckung-des-im-otto-stein-11043791.html>>, 5 October 2015.

12 Ibidem, 5 October 2015.

13 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/nobelpreistraegerin-herta-mueller-im-interview-die-akte-zeigt-oskar-pastior-umzingelt-11043761.html>>, 6 October 2015.

14 <<http://www.zeit.de/politik/2010-09/pastior-securitate-mueller>>, 5 October 2015.

15 <<http://www.zeit.de/2010/39/Oskar-Pastior>>, 18 October 2015.



was published in 1990 in the *Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter*, the journal of the SOKW: "He was set free after his conviction and incarceration for many years, but was never freed from the constraints of the communist state security service of Romania." He took his own life in 1969. Just like the author of the article, the person who wrote the final words at the end of the short article, which rendered one of Hoprich's poems and his "notice of assessment" along with introduction, also remained anonymous: "The poem 'Schweigen' (Remaining silent) was leaked to the Securitate by a 'friend'. Georg Hoprich died because he spoke the truth."<sup>16</sup>

Schlesak was also referring to this short summary that is restricted to allusions, which insiders indeed were able to interpret, when he published a text on 16 November 2010 after the first wave of media attention to the Pastior case, in which he now de facto posthumously terminated the friendship he swore to him in the first text. This article was already a reflection on his study of his own Securitate files and those of "Oskar Pastior and other perpetrators or victims and perpetrator-victims"<sup>17</sup>, in which Schlesak explicitly faults the previously unnamed Securitate informer – Oskar Pastior – for Hoprich's suicide:

A single poem had first cost [Hoprich] his freedom and then his life. This characterized the dangerous, and indeed deadly situation of literature at that time. Those who read

the allegedly harmless 'note informative' from 'Stein Otto' regarding 'Schlesak Dieter' nowadays, must recognize that 'modern poetry' was the 'ideology' of a purportedly subversive anti-state group in the eyes of the Securitate. Pastior only did not know that, rather told the Securitate what it wanted to hear and provided 'evidence' by means of betrayal of his friends. [...]. Is that possible? Can Oskar Pastior spit on and betray himself this way? He could – out of cowardliness.<sup>18</sup>

There were vocal reactions to this emotional tone: Stefan Sienerth urged "prudence and caution in dealing with these strange records"<sup>19</sup>. By contrast, the Banat author (and Herta Müller's ex-husband) Richard Wagner described Pastior as a "master of duplicity" in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*:<sup>20</sup> "In such a situation fear it is not only understandable, it is also entirely legitimate, but does not legitimate anything, not even denunciation. Fear is not a blank cheque and homosexuality is not either, even if it is regarded as a crime."<sup>21</sup> – The issue of morality became a theme.

The "revelations" and the resulting discourse regarding Oskar Pastior's biography raised a series of questions, which had already been answered for German domestic history two decades beforehand when considering the relatively extensive efforts to come to terms with the Eastern German past. Nevertheless, these questions should be asked again for the sake of dealing with the Romanian-German case: First the question should be clarified what exactly an informant did, how much

16 "Die wirre Nacht ist nicht verraucht...". In: *Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter* 39 (1990), Vol. 1, p. 14 (anon.). In Dieter Schlesak's blog entry from October 27th, 2010 Hans Bergel revealed his authorship of this article: <<http://schlesak.blogspot.com.au/2010/11/aus-hans-bergel-existenzgeiel.html>>, 5 October 2015.

17 <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/themen/oskar-pastiors-spitzelberichte-die-schule-der-schizophrenie-1582944.html>, 5 October 2015.

18 Ibidem.

19 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/interview-mit-dem-historiker-stefan-sienerth-der-mensch-pastior-muss-neu-bewertet-werden-11064732.html>>, 7 October 2015.

20 <<http://www.nzz.ch/vom-nachlass-zur-hinterlassenschaft-1.8414825>>, 5 October 2015.

21 Ibidem.

information he revealed and whether the denunciation exceeded the necessary extent (in order to not endanger oneself). Was it only fear that made him a perpetrator or personal interests as well? As for Pastior, the range of answers to these questions spans from the motivation of the already mentioned accusation of having caused a suicide (a suggested competitive relationship with the lyrically equally highly talented Hoprich comes to play here) to Wichner's determination that "Otto Stein" did not have any "fervor to denounce" anyone: "There is no evil and good Oskar Pastior, the betrayer and the great poet; he remains the single person who maintained a minimum degree of decency even under coercion."<sup>22</sup>

The question of the "extent" of guilt is closely related to the reflexive urge to draw comparisons with other perpetrators: In an article published in the *Tagesspiegel* entitled "*Dichtung und Verrat: Das Gleiche ist nicht Dasselbe*" (Literature and Betrayal: What is equal is not the same), Ernest Wichner reached deeply into the "poison cabinet" himself in order to exonerate Pastior. He mentions the real names of the unofficial employees "Ludwig Leopold", "Ehrlich", "Filip", "Gert Grundich" and "Moga/Marin" and calls on them to incriminate themselves: "Perhaps the unofficial employee 'Walter' will eventually gain the courage to tell us his legend in the lee of the unequally more famous informant."<sup>23</sup>

When the widely acclaimed Herta Müller says during an interview about a university lecturer who reported the most about the Pastior "He was homosexual, like Pastior. One wonders whether he is taking revenge for personal

reasons"<sup>24</sup>, her word has more weight than that of a usual witness of the *time*, but seldom a witness of the *crime*. An "outsider" may ask him or herself whether the "insider" has more information than the undiscerning reader of the files, or whether this is some kind of apologetics in the form of an unconfirmed assumption.

Furthermore, the question has been raised in the concrete Pastior discourse whether his works now need to be re-read. This is a discussion in the field of literature, which by no means can be regarded as secondary with respect to a Büchner prize laureate. The not so subtle question to be asked was: Did Pastior already offer indications of the guilt which he burdened on himself in his lyrical works? For Siennerth, it was only the person, and not the author Pastior, who should be reassessed.<sup>25</sup> Wagner had a similar opinion, even though he believed that Pastior's link between the world and literature, which formed a basis for ethics, had been severed: "His poems endure formally, but they do not have a moral echo; one can continue to read them but they do not say anything – not because they refuse to do so, rather because they are not allowed to reveal anything."<sup>26</sup> Wichner, by contrast, viewed Pastior as a person who put literature above everything and whose "hasty liberation" from his identity as the unofficial employee "Stein Otto" to the poet Oskar Pastior "can only be comprehended in his books of poetry".<sup>27</sup>

22 <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/dichtung-und-verrat-das-gleiche-ist-nicht-dasselbe/3917738.html>, 4 October 2015.

23 Ibidem.

24 <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/nobelpreistraegerin-herta-mueller-im-interview-die-akte-zeigt-oskar-pastior-umzingelt-11043761.html>, 5 October 2015.

25 <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/interview-mit-dem-historiker-stefan-siennerth-der-mensch-pastior-muss-neu-bewertet-werden-11064732.html>, 5 October 2015.

26 <http://www.nzz.ch/vom-nachlass-zur-hinterlassenschaft-1.8414825>, 7 October 2015.

27 <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/>

An additional dimension of this discourse which oscillated between the concepts of *justice* and *justification* led to a further well-known case by means of a verdict of the Higher Regional Court of Munich. In the final instance, it was decided that the defendants, the literary scholar Stefan Sienerth, the *Siebenbürgische Zeitung*, the official media outlet of the Association of Transylvanian Saxons, and the author Richard Wagner no longer may make and spread the claim that the writer and ethnologist Claus Stephani operated as an unofficial employee for the Securitate under the aliases “Moga” and “Marin”.<sup>28</sup> As the publicist Sabina Kienlechner reports in her essay “*Der arme Spitzel. Die rumäniendeutschen Schriftsteller und das juristische Debakel der Securitate-Aufarbeitung*” (The Poor Informant. The Romanian-German writers and the legal debacle of dealing with the Securitate past) in *Sinn und Form* 2014, the justification for this is that the definitive proof of a match between the alias and perpetrator – in this case the defendant – could not be produced<sup>29</sup>. Thus there were not only issues of *justice* and *justification*, but now also concrete legal issues as well.

The problem of the (lacking) reliability of sources is once again apparent here: during some phases of the Securitate regime and in

certain constellations of power, the reports did not have to be signed. In addition, they were often put in writing by the superiors on the basis of a conversation. In these cases – oral statements given under very problematic circumstances are left somewhere in-between observation and written form. The fact that the German court had access to written reports from the Romanian CNSAS, which confirm the identity of the aliases and real names, but ultimately could not prevent the injunction, points to an additional migration-related dimension of the complex issue of the Securitate and Romanian Germans: from a legal standpoint, German society has little to do with the misconduct of the temporally and geographically distant communist Romania and thus does not see any connection with regard to further legal succession measures. The categories *law* and *justice* did not even marginally touch each other in this case.

## CONCLUSION

At the latest in autumn 2010, the discourse regarding the entanglement of Romanian Germans in the machinations of the Securitate was no longer an exclusively endogenous Romanian-German matter, even though most of those involved in the discourse are still of Romanian-German origin. The publishing and academic world began to deal more intensively with the “lessons to be learned” from the Romanian Germans. On the one hand, this group is small and can be conveniently studied. On the other hand, the “sample” has proven to be large enough to draw generalizing conclusions for scientific purposes. In addition, it is affected by issues, which are of general societal importance for the 20th and 21st century: group affiliation, the effects of two dictatorships, migration and integration.

[buecher/autoren/oskar-pastior-und-die-securitate-die-spaete-entdeckung-des-im-otto-stein-11043791.html?printPagedArticle=true#aufmacherBildJum pTarget](http://www.buecher/autoren/oskar-pastior-und-die-securitate-die-spaete-entdeckung-des-im-otto-stein-11043791.html?printPagedArticle=true#aufmacherBildJum pTarget), 15 October 2015; see also <[http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/nobel-preistraegerin-herta-mueller-im-interview-die-akte-zeigt-oskar-pastior-umzingelt-11043761-p2.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex\\_2](http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/nobel-preistraegerin-herta-mueller-im-interview-die-akte-zeigt-oskar-pastior-umzingelt-11043761-p2.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_2)>, 15 October 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Sabina Kienlechner: *Der arme Spitzel. Die rumäniendeutschen Schriftsteller und das juristische Debakel der Securitate-Aufarbeitung*. In: *Sinn und Form* 66 (2014) Vol. 3, p. 310.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 311.

Thus, a relatively large share of the public is observing how the Romanian Germans are undergoing a painful process of coping with the past, which opens up new wounds time and time again, instead of bringing about the reconciliation initially hoped for. Several factors outlined on the basis of the examples above contribute to this very problematic situation of addressing the past from a scientific perspective:

1. The quality of the sources: the study of the communist period as the history of authoritarian regimes, in particular the perpetrator and victim perspectives, is based, as already hinted, on written records that are very difficult to deal with. Secret service files are written for superiors, and not for researchers, and memories fade away. What remains is an extremely problematic set of records with unsigned reports, files that are incomplete or cannot be found, or files that are claimed to be incomplete. Therefore, a historical interpretation based to the greatest possible extent on a methodologically sound mixture of sources must be carried out.
2. The large quantity of material: The “poison cabinets” are largely still unopened and still contain enough explosive material, in order to prevent a “reconciliation” of any kind that puts an end to the process. The resources for a systematic approach are lacking, which means that the pieces of the mosaic are only put together randomly and on the basis of subjective criteria.
3. Dealing with two authoritarian regimes simultaneously: The Romanian Germans also have only begun to intensively analyze the National-Socialist era. The efforts to simultaneously come to terms with “non-simultaneous” authoritarian experiences and the necessity to deal with both regimes to a similar extent complicate a concentrated

debate, but also open up possibilities for a holistic approach.

4. The hardly moderated involvement of both indirectly and directly affected persons: their insider knowledge and in some cases personal animosities “imported” from Romania, which are abetted in a small community such as that of the Romanian Germans, bring a cognitive bias into the discourse, which is very comprehensible from a personal standpoint, but transcends by far the normal degree of emotional identification of a researcher with his or her object of research.

It is an entirely legitimate thought for those affected to demand *justice* for past misdeeds, in particular when they lead to fractured or even failed biographies. It also must be assured that the “perpetrators” can explain themselves, if one does not want to fall for the same methods as the past regimes, which essentially eliminated the freedom of opinion. What is more difficult to implement and not the goal of research is the approximate congruence of *justice* and *law*.

The written word thus remains a “danger and endangerment”, while the process of dealing with the past on the basis of the Securitate files will remain painful. However, a professional instrument for analyzing this problematic type of sources could alleviate the process. An example of this is the discussion held at the conference “From the poison cabinets of communism. Methodological questions on working with surveillance files in South-Eastern and Central Europe”, which was jointly carried out by the IKGS, the Humboldt University of Berlin and the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity.<sup>30</sup> It is imperative to conduct a thorough analysis of the repressive apparatus and its actors, who

<sup>30</sup> Conference blog: <[www.giftschrank.net](http://www.giftschrank.net)>, 7 October 2015.



produced these files, before the multifaceted explanatory power of the relevant texts can be determined. Besides the international comparative approach, in particular in view of research on the East German Stasi, it will be important to take an inter-relational historical perspective, as demonstrated above all by Georg Herbstritt in his analysis of the Stasi files regarding Romania and the Romanian Germans. One desideratum is the opening of the archives of the Romanian foreign intelligence service though. This additional angle would facilitate a more comprehensive picture of the processes during that period.<sup>31</sup> In order to gain a better overall picture, the focus must be directed away from individual persons to institutions and their relationship to the regime – and in particular the question how attempts were made to infiltrate church organizations<sup>32</sup> and how great the willingness of religious communities was to cooperate with the regime. Were there some free spheres after all in this system of surveillance and repression – and can they be identified by reading the secret service records? Examples of this can be found in the church community as well as in youth culture or in the literary scene. Furthermore, the value of the records for historiography beyond secret service activities must be assessed: Can secret service reports be fruitful for writing individual and collective biographies? Can the records also tell a story about everyday life? The perspective of and towards minorities, whether they

are religious, linguistic, ethnic or groups marginalized beyond visibility such as punks, homosexuals, or religious sects, enables us to illuminate these issues “from the edge” and promises additional knowledge and insights for research on dictatorships. With regard to the short, exemplary discourse analysis on the “Pastior case”, the history of the impact of the opening of the Securitate archives gradually must be discussed.<sup>33</sup>

In order to facilitate this development, the responsibility for the administration of the “poison cabinets” must ultimately become a pan-European matter. Embedding the subject in broader contexts not only leads us away from the ethnocentric victim myth, but also makes comparative and inter-relational historical approaches possible. Both goals – coming to terms with history individually and collectively and distanced scientific research – by no means exclude one another, rather can productively complement one another – so that the focus will not be on what “Moga’s” or “Cristina’s” real names were for all eternity.

*Translated by Michael Dobbins*

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31 Herbstritt published several publications on this topic: <<http://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/Wissen/Forschung/Mitarbeiter/herbstritt.html>>, 15 October 2015.

32 A relevant project is currently being carried out at the IKGS: “Strukturen, Strategien, Methoden und Mechanismen der Unterwanderung und Hörigmachung der Evangelischen Kirche A. B. in Rumänien im kommunistischen Staat (1945–1969)”.

33 For a critical approach regarding the discourse of *Aufarbeitung* see e. g. Michaela Nowotnick: “95 Jahre Haft”. Kronstädter Schriftstellerprozess 1959: Darstellungsformen und Deutungsmuster der *Aufarbeitung*. In: *Halbjahresschrift für südosteuropäische Geschichte, Literatur und Politik* (2012) Vol. 1/2, pp. 173–181.

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# Between their Will for Self-assertion and Securing their Livelihood

## Challenges for the German Minority in Romania in the 21st Century – the Example of Hermannstadt/Sibiu

by Benjamin Józsa, Sibiu/Hermannstadt

On a mild summer evening in the year 2000 two youths hung up election posters in Sibiu, Romania, which is known as Hermannstadt in German. Although they were not sophisticatedly designed, they drew the attention of two older men, who moved closer.



Sibiu - manhole cover with the coat of arms.  
Photo Kathrin Biegger

“That is him”, murmured one of them, “our Saxon”.

The Transylvanian Saxon they were referring to was no other than the still little known physics teacher Klaus Johannis (born 1959), who was preparing to run for the office of mayor, although his chances were entirely uncertain.

Hermannstadt/Sibiu (population: approx. 155,000) could hardly be distinguished from other mid-sized Romanian cities at the beginning of the new millennium. The post-

communist gloom of prefabricated high-rise buildings, giant landscapes of useless factories, a run-down old town, poorly functioning public services were just a few things which characterized life in Hermannstadt/Sibiu. The general mood fluctuated between resignation and morbid humor.

The Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania catered to this mood when it promised “a good administration” and nothing else during the municipal elections in the year 2000.

The reputation of being diligent and efficient administrators already preceded the Romanian Germans, not only in Hermannstadt/Transylvania, but also in the Banat, the Satu Mare region, in Bukovina and in the Romanian Old Kingdom.

The Romanian-German population indeed shrunk to a fraction of what it used to be due to its destiny after the war – deportation to the USSR, misappropriation of their private, collective and church property as well as emigration primarily to Germany (only 120,000 of the 800,000 Romanian Germans from the interwar period were still left in 1992)<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, they still had a strong will to assert themselves politically.

In the first days of the year 1989, representatives of the Romanian Germans already decided to establish a self-representation body for the German minority, which they named in somewhat baroque fashion “Democratic Forum of the Germans in Romania” based on the mood at that time<sup>2</sup>. The forum, as it was referred to colloquially, already primarily defined itself politically in its early stages. The members wanted to participate in the social development of Romania and represent the

<sup>1</sup> [www.recensamantromania.ro](http://www.recensamantromania.ro)

<sup>2</sup> Entry no. 473 at the district court of Hermannstadt/Sibiu from 19 February 1990

German minority. Thus the forum aimed to be much more than a folk costume association. The forum firmly committed itself to remaining in the homeland and deliberately followed the century-old political tradition of the pre-war era. "Not to speak about us without us" was the motto, which runs like a thread through the activities of the forum up to today.

Legislation soon accounted for this peculiarity of the German as well as the larger Hungarian minority: the twenty minority associations of Romania can take part in elections as if they were a party, even though they are registered as associations<sup>3</sup>. As a result, the minorities are represented with one delegate each in the lower house of the Romanian parliament<sup>4</sup> and are united in one parliamentary group, the "group of small minorities".<sup>5</sup> Since the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania (DFDR) attached particular importance to local politics, it nominated candidates in all municipalities and cities in which this was possible.

Despite all of this, resolute and integrity-based actions would have not sufficed alone. It was no coincidence that the DFDR played a prominent role in Hermannstadt/Sibiu, in particular, even though it was represented in most large cities of Romania. On the one hand, Hermannstadt/Sibiu had been the political center of the Transylvanian Saxons for centuries, a circumstance, which was already embedded in the conscience of the Romanian

majority. On the other hand, the size of Hermannstadt/Sibiu was ideal for conveying the message to a group which had become smaller, as is the case with the Romanian Germans. Moreover, all signs pointed to a protest vote in Hermannstadt/Sibiu around the year 2000. The center-right parties did not have a concept to offer, let alone a vision for the development of the city. The same applied to the leftist parties, which also had the negative reputation of being recruited from the old cadres of the Communist Party from the pre-transformation period. And therefore something occurred, which was initially unthinkable for everyone. Klaus Johannis was elected mayor of Hermannstadt/Sibiu in the second round of voting with nearly 69 per cent<sup>6</sup> of the vote. Four city councilmen from the DFRD joined the city council together with him. It soon became apparent that an exceptional talent had moved into the city hall: in a few years Klaus Johannis succeeded in making peace with the Social-Democratic Party of Romania (PDSR), which abandoned its initial obstruction tactic in the city council. As a result, public services became fully functional for the first time (a functioning public cleansing service was still seldom in Romania in the year 2000) and paved the path towards electoral success in 2004. After all, without a functional political coalition in the city council, it would not be possible to clean up the city for the long-term.

After a professionally conducted electoral campaign, 16 city council members (of 23) from the DFDR subsequently entered city hall - a previously unheard of success. This constituted a turning point for the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania: for the first time a minority association was responsible

<sup>3</sup> According to the Law on Political Parties 14/2003

<sup>4</sup> Representatives of minorities must receive a smaller number of votes, amounting to 10 % of the share of votes, which a representative receives by average.

<sup>5</sup> The Hungarian minority is a special case. It reaches the 5% threshold and is represented by a parliamentary group both in the upper and lower house.

<sup>6</sup> [www.sibiu.ro](http://www.sibiu.ro)



for the representation of the Romanian majority, a task which would require a great deal of finesse and institution.

Yet the mayor and councilmen mastered this task as well. They kept out of political discussions and focused on city development. They initially aimed to increase investments and strengthen cultural life, while establishing a functioning public administration and developing tourism.

The easiest part was what initially seemed difficult: attracting investments to the city. The German language and a functioning German school system quickly facilitated communication with German investors. Due to the speedy public administration (often only a few weeks and sometimes even just a few days passed from expression of interest to the first ground-breaking ceremony) and the German-speaking employees at city hall, who actively provided advice and support to the potential investors, the city was soon able to report the sale of all property in the first commercial park - and soon the second as well. And after just a few years of full employment, the people of Hermannstadt/Sibiu earned their money from Siemens, Continental, Marquardt, Tondach, and RUD-Ketten, to name just a few.

Simultaneously to the investments, the city's budget increased tenfold in just a few years. In addition to the increased tax revenues, the improved taxpayer ethics also played a role. (The firms were initially warned, and then the tax liabilities were made public. If this was of no avail, the tax collectors were sent out).

Thus, the city began to clean the streets as well as the pipes below them. The main city squares as well as the city hall were renovated. The state philharmonic orchestra was given a new headquarters. New buses started operating, which were even on time. Hermannstadt/



A view to the downtown of Sibiu. Photo Kathrin Biegger

Sibiu slowly started to become more like other Central European cities and attract the first herds of tourists.

Hermannstadt/Sibiu's experience as cultural capital in Europe in 2007 provided the greatest impetus. In order to become more visible on the map of cultural cities, Hermannstadt/Sibiu competed together with the metropolis of Luxembourg in 2004 to act as European cultural capital of 2007. As chance would have it, the year as cultural capital coincided with Romania's accession to the European Union. Suddenly the city was visible across Europe. The Hermannstadt/Sibiu theater festival – Europe's third largest -, the jazz festival, the state philharmonic orchestra, the Bach choir, the many outdoor festivals were suddenly accessible to a large public. And the city greatly benefited, as the restaurant and hotel industry and even the international airport

only began to fully develop after the flow of tourists in 2007.

After two additional electoral victories in 2008 and 2012, in which the mayor was re-elected with more than 80 percent of the vote respectively and the Forum maintained its two-third majority in the city council, Klaus Johannis opted to become involved in national politics. In order to gain a foothold in Romanian state politics, Klaus Johannis had to leave the Forum though, because presidential campaigns cannot be financed or operated by a small association. He found a new political home in the center-right National Liberal Party, which is a member of the European People's Party. The National Liberal Party nominated him as its presidential candidate in 2014 and introduced him to the broader public to whom he was previously not well-known. Although he had to endure the dirtiest campaign of post-transition period (he was accused of not being a real Romanian, a German and not a Romanian citizen; even his childlessness was openly criticized), he asserted himself with his calm perseverance. Despite this – or perhaps precisely because of this – the election of a German candidate was a political sensation. It shifted the focus of attention to the small community of Romanian Germans, which once again proved that it is not a matter of size, rather the will to actively participate in social and political affairs.

However political successes cannot disguise the fact that the Romanian German community faces enormous challenges.

The first – and most difficult – challenge is the demographic development of the past decades. Of the 119,462 Romanian Germans in 1992, only 59,764 remained in 2002. The 2011 census was again sobering – 36,042 citizens of Romania identified themselves as

Germans and 26,557<sup>7</sup> indicated that German is their mother language. Along with this, the German population is overaged and there are few young people – a situation which is now already impacting the activities of the Forum. The second great task is to maintain school instruction in German. Up to now, the German schools could only be preserved due to Romanian pupils who are in the majority. Since German schools are regarded as elite schools in Romania, the Romanian majority likes to send their children there because they tend to have good opportunities on the German labor market with their German language skills.

Yet despite the general popularity of the German schools, the operations of 30% of the German classes had to be shut down, not due to lack of pupils, rather the absence of teachers. The teaching profession in Romania is chronically underpaid, which means that a job in the German-speaking businesses in Romania is a viable alternative for German-speaking teachers. The most financially challenging task is to preserve the cultural assets. The church fortresses of Transylvania, the Brukenthal Museum in Hermannstadt (one of the first public museums in Europe), additional material as well as non-material cultural heritage must be preserved. The main actors, the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, have done very much in this regard, but their efforts alone are by far not sufficient to maintain all these cultural assets. Despite numerous private initiatives this task will continue to define the agenda for several decades.

The German minority in Romania is faced with

<sup>7</sup> All data are official census results from the Romanian National Institute of Statistics. ([www.recensamantromania.ro](http://www.recensamantromania.ro))

an enormous challenge at the beginning of the 21st century. It must raise a new generation of young people and offer them prospects to stay in the country. It must strive to preserve the school system and ensure that the schools do not degenerate into mere language schools. It must preserve material cultural goods and keep alive non-material cultural assets in the 21st century. And finally, Romanian Germans must remain loyal to themselves, as an independent and distinguishable voice in both the German and Romanian chorus.

*Translated by Michael Dobbins*

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Benjamin Józsa, born in 1973, completed his degree in Germanic studies in Hermannstadt/Sibiu. Since 1991 he has held various voluntary and full-time functions in the *Democratic Forum of the Germans in Romania* (DFDR). He is also involved in publishing, initially as the editor of the youth magazine *Der Punkt*, and later as a freelance collaborator with the *Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung in Rumänien* (ADZ). Since 2014 Józsa has been the full-time director of the DFDR.

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